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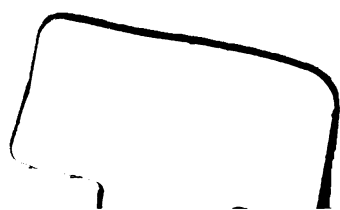
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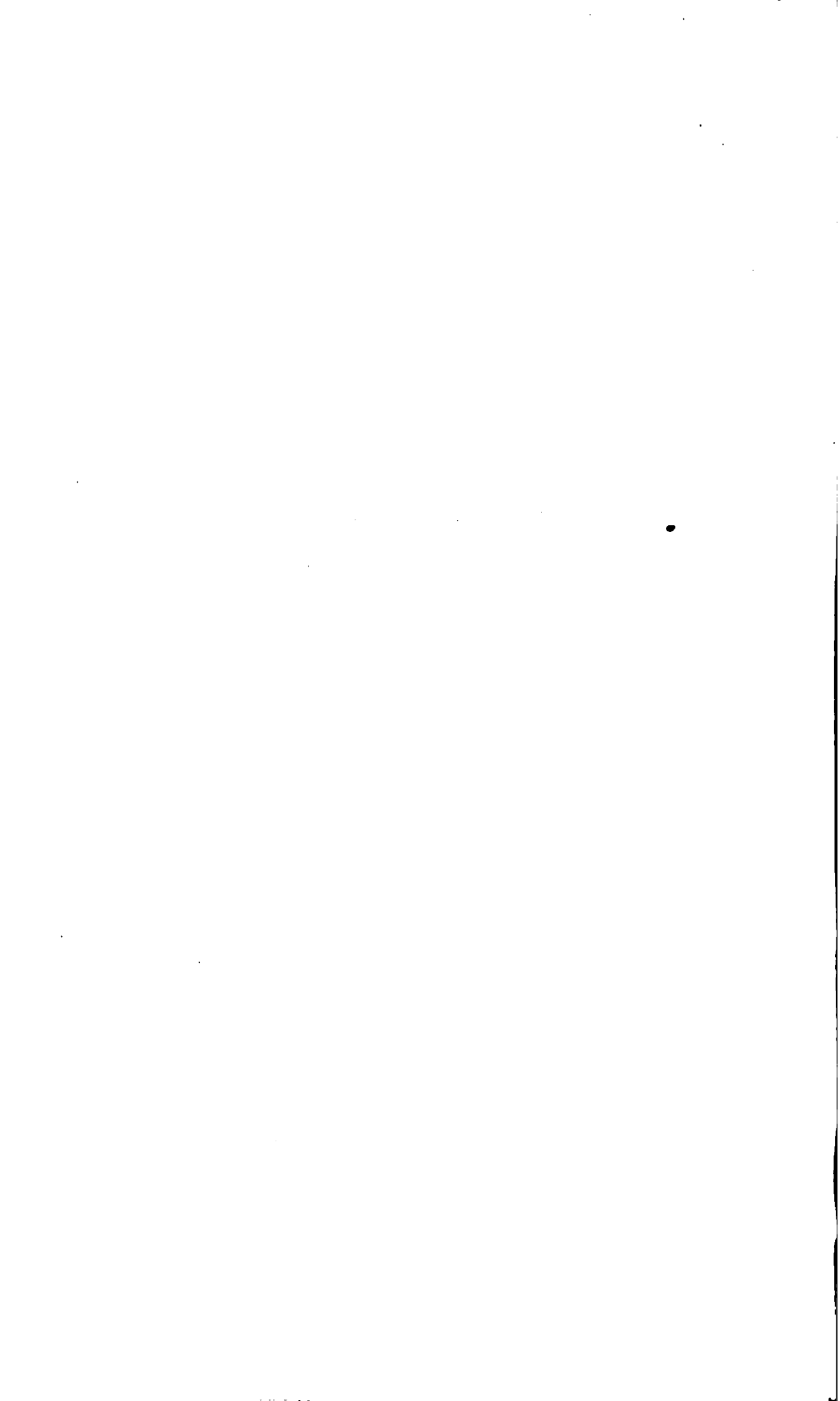
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# J E A N.

A Novel.

*Mary Wentworth.*

By MRS. NEWMAN,

AUTHOR OF "TOO LATE."

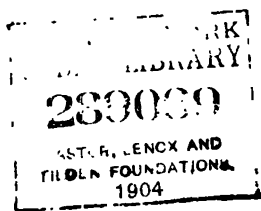
"For love in sequel works with fate."



NEW YORK:  
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,  
FRANKLIN SQUARE.

1875.





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## J E A N .

## CHAPTER I

## THE POYNDERS.

"NOT bills, I hope, Louis?" said Mrs. Poynder, glancing uneasily at some large blue envelopes on the table by her son's plate, as she entered the pretty breakfast-room at Fernside. A slight, gentle-looking widow, of about fifty years of age, with very few traces of by-gone prettiness in her care-worn face, followed by her daughter, a fair, graceful, distinguished-looking girl of about five-and-twenty. They belong to the upper middle class, and, to judge by appearances, possess ample means for keeping up their position.

Visitors at Fernside, a pretty cottage, situated on the outskirts of a small town in Cambridgeshire, and facing a wide stretch of pleasant heath, give Mrs. Poynder credit for living much within her means. There is no mystery about her antecedents. The dean, her father, had been well known in Raystone, as also had been her husband, the late Dr. Poynder, who was tutor and fellow of his college before his marriage, and afterward held a good living in the vicinity of his former labors. Mrs. Poynder is said to have inherited a good fortune from both her father and husband, and her humility in choosing to live at Fernside when she might have had the best house in Raystone is very much admired. If she has not the best house, she is in the best society. To be well received at Fernside is the Raystone test of gentility. Many an anxious mother of her acquaintance envies Mrs. Poynder, as one exempt from the cares and troubles of ordinary mortals. Her daughter is the acknowledged beauty of Raystone, and her intelligence said to be as much above the ordinary standard as her beauty. Her son was in the best set at the university (his having made no mark there is looked upon as a matter of choice); and, well off as she now is, every body knows there is a large fortune to come from a bachelor brother in India. In fine, she appears to be one of the very few who draw no blanks in the lottery of life.

Louis Poynder, a tall, well-built, and, of a certain type, fine-looking young man of about seven-and-twenty, opened one after

the other the envelopes by his side, glanced at their contents with lowering brows, thrust them into the pockets of his morning-coat, and turned toward his mother.

"Isn't there a letter due from the old man now, mother?"

She sighed. "I wish you would not depend so much upon them, Louis. There is no positive promise to go beyond college expenses, you know; and if—"

"What's that under one?" he impatiently broke in, indicating one among two or three others by her own plate. "Isn't it— Yes, there it is. Open it—quick—there's a good mater, and let us know how much this time."

Maud Poynder set down her cup and fixed her eyes upon her mother. The color in Mrs. Poynder's cheeks was a little heightened. She broke the seal with trembling fingers. She had her own special reasons for anxiety respecting the contents of this Indian letter. She read a few lines, and then let the paper fall into her lap, every vestige of color dying out of her face as she sat staring at her children with blank, despairing eyes.

"What is it?"

"What does he say?" they ejaculated, in some surprise.

"He says—" She glanced at the letter again to make sure she had read aright. "Oh, Louis—Maud—my poor children! your uncle has been married for years, and has a grown-up daughter!"

"Disgusting old hypocrite!"

"It can not be true. Are you sure it is uncle's handwriting? Let me look, mamma." Maud took the letter from her mother's nerveless fingers, and read it slowly through, her voice sinking into a whisper as she concluded:

"MY DEAR MARIA,—Such news as I have to communicate is best told as concisely as possible; especially since I must ask you to excuse my not giving any explanation respecting the cause of my having hitherto been silent upon the subject. You will doubtless be very much surprised to hear that I was married seventeen years ago, and that I have a daughter just sixteen, who has resided in England since her ear-

childhood. I lost my wife, under circumstances upon which I can not enlarge, a year after the child's birth, and as quickly as possible sent the latter to a better climate. She was placed at school, and given to understand that the better her progress there the better it would be for herself, since she would have to depend upon her own exertions for a livelihood; which it was my intention, until latterly, she should do. For reasons I can not explain I have now altered my plans, and trust that you will be willing to co-operate with me. To that end I offer you five hundred a year to take the girl into your family, and treat her as your niece and my heir, which she will be. She has hitherto been known under the name of Bell—Joan Bell; but she will now resume her rightful one of Raymond. According to the school-mistress's annual reports to my solicitor, the girl has fair abilities, and has progressed tolerably well with her studies. Her character and disposition I, of course, know nothing about. I have written to Jean by this mail, and my solicitor, Mr. Farrar, will arrange with Miss Bowles, whose address I inclose, for her departure from Ivy Lodge as soon as it may be convenient to you to send for or fetch her. I trust that you and her cousins will do your best to give Jean a comfortable home until my return to England, which will be at no distant date, this climate beginning to tell upon me at last. Farrar will hand over to you the first half-year's installment; also two hundred a year to Jean for her own spending. With my love and best wishes for yourself and boy and girl,

“Your affectionate brother,

“OLIVER RAYMOND.

“P.S.—Louis appeared to have some natural ability, and ought to have done better at college. It was a fair launch for him, and he ought now to be making his way. If, on my return, I find him steadily at work, I may give him a little further help; but he must not depend upon it.”

There was dead silence. Each saw a fair castle crumble into ruins—a castle built out of the wealth which was to go to this stranger. Mrs. Poynder was very far from being as well off as she had the credit for being, and she was beginning to feel that she was not really the richer for her brother's large gifts. Left with two children and a small income, she had commenced her widowed life frugally enough; grateful for a little occasional help from her brother, without depending upon it. But as years passed on, and the remittances became more frequent and of larger amount, she had come to take them more as a matter of course. It was natural enough that she should do so. Oliver Raymond was her only brother; acknowledged to having amassed great wealth

(when large fortunes were made by enterprising men in the Indian civil service), and was supposed to have no domestic ties of his own. Then he had always shown so much interest in his sister's affairs, and seemed to give what he gave in such a matter-of-course way, indirectly encouraging her to think that her children would be his heirs, as, indeed, he had intended them to be. If Mrs. Poynder occasionally made some feeble protest against her children depending too much upon their uncle's wealth, she in her heart never doubted their succeeding to it. His very generosity, leading them, as it had, to believe that the supply would never fail, and cultivate their tastes accordingly, seemed almost cruel now. “Even the allowance of four hundred a year for her son's college expenses had only encouraged the boy to form expensive tastes,” thought the poor mother. If they had known there would be no more than her poor three hundred a year to depend upon, of course her children would have grown up very differently. What in the world would they do, Louis and Maud, with their expensive habits and tastes? Even if this daughter proved amiable and easy to get on with, and the five hundred a year were likely to continue, it would be less than they had been accustomed to receive from her brother. The total of many a previous year had far exceeded the sum now offered in such a business-like way as an equivalent for his daughter's maintenance. Then poor Mrs. Poynder's heart sunk at the recollection of two or three housekeeping bills which must shortly be met, and which she had depended upon her brother's bounty to meet. Although Fernside was called a cottage, and was unpretending enough from an external point of view, she prided herself upon its internal refinement. All the minutiae of their daily life had gradually become more refined and luxurious as year by year her brother's remittances duly arrived, and increased in amount. She was beginning to have grave suspicions that four hundred a year had not paid her son's expenses at college; she could not but notice that tradesmen's letters to him were increasing in number, and that his uneasiness was increasing in proportion. Poor Maud, too, how terribly hard this was for her! The dear child naturally liked to look the same as other girls in her own position in society, and milliners were so very exorbitant in their charges!

Maud Poynder stood gazing out of the window, an expression in her fair face which a few moments previously it would have appeared incapable of taking. Whatever her reflections, she was the first to recover self-control. Resuming her seat at the breakfast-table, she quietly said,

“You will take her, of course, mamma?”

"We can not refuse the money, dear."

"No."

"And, after all, five hundred a year will do a great deal, you know, dears," said Mrs. Poynder, hastily doing a little mental sum in addition as she looked anxiously at her children.

Her son shrugged his shoulders a little contemptuously.

"What can you give me to tide over the present with, mother?"

"I am afraid very little, if any thing, Louis," nervously replied Mrs. Poynder. "My next dividends are all due for—for housekeeping. And you know you begged so hard for the last hundred, that I could not pay Maud's bills."

"She's awfully extravagant."

Maud smiled, took up the offending letter, and slowly went through it again, carefully weighing each sentence as she read it.

"You must 'sell out' two or three hundreds for me, mother; it won't make much difference in your income, you know," pleaded Louis to his mother, in an under-tone. "It's so deuced hard—so unexpected, coming upon a fellow like this."

Mrs. Poynder made no reply, glancing uneasily toward her daughter. Maud put down the letter, and said, in her usual low, sweet, even tone,

"There is some mystery about 'the girl,' as he terms her. He has evidently been for some reason prejudiced against her, and has only just made up his mind to take her into favor. The change of name, too?" She reflected a few moments, and then added, "Yes, it might have been worse. Better she should be here than anywhere else."

Mrs. Poynder's face brightened, and she looked admiringly at her daughter. Dear Maud was so clever and clear-headed, so self-possessed in any emergency!

"Yes, of course it is, dear; and we must try to make the best of it."

"The best won't be any thing very bright," said her son, impatiently. "Even Maud's fine intelligence can not make black white."

"I do not mean to attempt it," quietly returned his sister. "I shall content myself with making the most of the material that comes to hand, black or white."

"Your uncle says I am to fetch her," hastily put in Mrs. Poynder, always a little nervous when it came to crossing swords between Maud and her brother. The latter gathered up his papers and quit the room. What he had to say to his mother must be said out of his sister's hearing.

"Of course you will use your own judgment about that, mamma."

Mrs. Poynder's eyes asked what her own judgment was to be; and, quite accustomed to such appeals, her daughter promptly replied, "If she is inclined to think much of

herself, your going might make her think more, perhaps, and that would not be the best beginning for us. At present we have no clue whatever to her character. Write a pleasant note telling her about your neuralgia—you are always liable to it, you know—and begging her to come to us as soon as possible. We will meet her at the station, if she lets us know her train."

"Yes, dear; yes, of course that would be best. I will write at once," said Mrs. Poynder, rising from her seat with alacrity.

"And, mamma, there is really no necessity to take people into our confidence—about your receiving her here, and what Uncle Oliver says about leaving her his money. He *may* change his mind again, you know." A soft rosy tint covered her cheeks as she went on. "Louis is so deficient in tact! Couldn't you point out to him that Nugent need not know? Tell him it will be wiser, for his own sake, to say no more than that you are going to give your niece a home with us. You will not forget the words, dear—give your niece a home with us?"

"I will remember; and indeed I think you are quite right—there really is no necessity to say more." Then, with an anxious, inquiring look at her daughter, "I thought Nugent was very marked in his attentions last night, Maud dear?"

"Did you?" sweetly replied Maud. But she said no more, and her mother did not venture to question further.

## CHAPTER II.

### JEAN.

It was the recreation-hour—between breakfast and nine o'clock study—at Ivy Lodge. Miss Bowles entered the room in which her pupils were gathered, laughing and talking away the time in school-girl fashion, with the morning's letters in her hand. There was immediate silence, all eyes turning with eager expectancy toward her as she proceeded to distribute them.

"The Miss Laytons, Julia and Kate, Miss Thornton, Miss Emily Gerrard," read Miss Bowles—ah, how slowly! to the ears of the impatient girls—placing a letter in each outstretched hand; "Miss Tyndale, Miss Bell—Miss Bell." Miss Bowles peered curiously down through her eyeglass at the address, to be quite sure she had read aright, then looked across the room to where sat a young girl bending over a book, and repeated, in a slightly raised voice, "Miss Bell."

Half-suppressed whisperings and titterings among Miss Bowles's young ladies. "A letter for Jean! The idea of Jean having a letter! Too ridiculous!" One of them

touching the young girl's shoulder, and she reluctantly looked up from her book, keeping her finger on the last word her eyes had rested on.

"A letter for you, Miss Bell."

She rose and slowly walked toward Miss Bowles, apparently in no way elated by the intelligence; indeed, taking it for granted that she would hear the same words she had heard upon two or three previous occasions—"Oh no, a mistake, I perceive. Not for you, Miss Bell." But Miss Bowles was still holding the letter toward her. The girl took it awkwardly enough. Her eyes fastened upon it in so much doubt and bewilderment as to cause an involuntary burst of laughter from the light-hearted lookers-on. But they were reminded by Miss Bowles that such violent ebullitions were inelegant in the extreme, not to say vulgar, and the laughter toned down to a titter again. Then she went on to invite each young lady who had received a letter to come presently to her morning-room, and report to her as to the health of the home-circle. It was one of the fictions of Ivy Lodge—which the prospectuses set forth was a happy home, and *not* an ordinary school—that Miss Bowles trusted implicitly to her young ladies' honor, and considered their correspondence sacred. Nevertheless, it was understood to be a mark of good-breeding to offer all letters for her inspection. They were generally waved aside with a graceful little bow and smile; but not, her "dear young ladies" affirmed, before her sharp little eyes had seen through and through them. They quite understood, too, why she sometimes fell to admiring the handwriting, and begged a closer inspection, and would have respected her more if she had given her true reason, and acted as school-mistresses generally do with young ladies' correspondence. As Miss Bowles quitted the room all eyes turned curiously upon Jean Bell again. A tall, slim, undeveloped-looking girl, with gold-brown hair, eyes to match, a pale face too grave for her years, and a general uncared-for appearance; the coarse merino dress, hanging ungracefully about her angular figure, having been chosen with regard to its capabilities for wear only, and being simply hooked at the throat, without any frill or bow or scrap of ribbon to relieve its ugliness. At this moment, too, she is looking her very worst, standing with the letter crushed in her hand, frowning angry defiance at the laughing faces around her.

"Letters are intended to be opened, Jean."

"Do open it and tell us, Jean. It is sure to be something wonderful!"

"It's a love-letter from old Tommy West."

"It's a bill for sweets."

"No, she has turned out to be a rich princess, and a fairy godmother is coming to fetch her away in a gold coach."

"Do tell us, Jean."

Jean tossed the letter toward them. "Find out for yourselves!" Then she went back to her corner, took up her book again, and sat with her head bent over it.

Little Rose Wylee picked up the letter and carried it to Jean. "It was only fun," she whispered, slipping it into her hand and turning away. Jean glanced furtively round. The girls had gathered about the fortunate recipients of letters, who were reading out scraps of home news, and had forgotten her. She tenderly smoothed out the crushed letter—her own letter—the only one she had ever received—glanced shyly round again, opened it, and began to read.

"My dear daughter." Daughter! Her heart beat wildly a moment, then stood still. It was a mistake, after all! She rose from her seat, pale and quiet enough now, and passed out of the room, unheeding the laughing questions with which she was assailed. She went to Miss Bowles's sanctum, knocked at the door, and was bidden to enter.

"It was a mistake, ma'am; the letter is not for me."

"Sit down, Miss Bell," absently replied Miss Bowles, who was reading a letter of her own, with a very surprised face.

The girl waited quietly, with heavy, downcast eyes.

"Most astonishing! Remarkably strange! So entirely unlooked for!" at intervals ejaculated Miss Bowles, apparently quite forgetting Jean's presence and her own habit of reticence. Presently she laid the open letter upon her lap, crossed her mittened hands upon it, and looked at Jean as Jean had never been looked at before. Astonishment, curiosity, gladness, regret, all jostled each other in Miss Bowles's face at once. But she had so long cultivated one expression that the muscles of her face refused to obey this sudden demand upon them, and the contortions her features underwent quite startled Jean as she slowly raised her eyes.

"Are you not well, ma'am?" she asked, fearing Miss Bowles was going to have a fit. "May I get you any thing?"

"No; wait here." Then, in a measure recovering her self-control, Miss Bowles went on, "I have received a most astonishing communication, Miss—" She stared at Jean a moment. "I am really almost at a loss how to inform you; but if these letters are genuine—and I must say they appear to be so—your future position in life will be very different from that which you have been taught to expect. But the instructions I received respecting you have been scrupulously com-

plied with, and therefore I can not be held responsible for the tone of your mind and manners being more suited to one having to depend upon her own exertions for a livelihood than to a young lady with a position in society. I have conscientiously endeavored to make you understand that you must not place yourself upon the same level as my other young ladies, who possess greater advantages."

"I never did," bluntly from Jean.

"I am not complaining, my dear."

Jean's eyes opened wide. It was quite the exception for Miss Bowles not to complain, and the "my dear" Jean had only heard once before, when she had been asked to assist some of the younger girls in their practicing. There was a half-pathetic smile upon the girl's face as she softly replied (not knowing what else to say), "Thank you."

"Not at all, my dear. I only regret that I was not informed of your prospects at the outset"—and here Miss Bowles was perfectly sincere—"so that I might have acted differently. Have you read the letter?"

"No, ma'am. It began, 'My dear Daughter,' so I knew it was not for me."

"But it is for you, my dear Jean—from your papa in India."

Jean's hands closed tightly over the letter, and she rose from her seat white and still, her brown eyes fastened upon Miss Bowles's face as that lady went on: "It appears that for some reason, which he does not explain, your papa wished you to be unaware of his existence, and trained to depend upon your own exertions for your bread. But he has now changed his mind, and desires you to take your rightful name, and leave Ivy Lodge. Your name, it appears, is Raymond; and, from what I gather, you will inherit a large fortune. For the present you are to reside with your aunt, Mrs. Poynder—who, I happen to know, is a lady very well connected indeed—and her children. But your letter will doubtless give you the details. I also have one from the solicitor who has always acted as your papa's agent with me, confirming all that is stated in Mr. Raymond's letter. Accept my congratulations, my dear."

Had Jean been trained like Miss Bowles's other young ladies, she would have probably made some little graceful speech in return; as it was, the congratulations might as well have been unspoken.

"May I read this letter alone, ma'am?"

"Certainly; I have not the least objection. But, my dear child, pray oblige me by re-entering and leaving the room in a more lady-like manner. How often have you heard me point out the impropriety of extreme haste! Abrupt movements are always inelegant."

Jean returned a few steps, courtesied to Miss Bowles, and walked slowly out of the

room. Outside it, elegance and propriety were forgotten. She ran swiftly up to one of the dormitories and shut herself in, locking and double-locking the door.

"Why, Miss Bell! whatever is the matter?" ejaculated a good-humored-looking house-maid, who was dusting the room.

Falling upon her neck, Jean sobbed out, "Oh, Sarah, I've got a father!"

"Got a father!" echoed Sarah, who, like the rest of Ivy Lodge, looked upon Jean as a waif and a stray, whose beginning must have been somewhat like that of the memorable Topsy. She was the only one in the house who had no relation with the outside world—to whom no letter ever came, and who had never heard a kinder word than Miss Bowles could speak. Sarah, whose father, a drunken cabman, had been the terror of his children, went on, consolingly, "Don't take on so about it, Miss Bell dear."

But Jean heard her not. Sitting down upon the floor—chairs were not considered necessary in the dormitories—she was laughing and crying over her letter, almost beside herself with joy. Sarah eyed her doubtfully a few moments, and then went on with her work.

With trembling hands Jean opened her precious letter, and began to read it. The missive ran as follows:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER,—For reasons which, if it be necessary to explain at all, must not be explained upon paper, I have hitherto kept you in ignorance of my existence, and had you educated so as to be capable of earning your own bread. I may have made a mistake, but you will not, I think, be any the worse for not having been brought up as an heiress and surrounded by flatterers." (Oliver Raymond omitted to take into account the evil which might arise from shutting out love from his daughter's life; probably because he had for many a long year tried to satisfy his own mind by scoffing at the word.) "At any rate, I have now changed my mind respecting your future. I desire you to take your rightful name of Raymond, and to reside with your aunt, Mrs. Poynder, of Fernside, Raystone. She will be amply compensated for taking charge of you, and your own private allowance will be two hundred a year, as befits your position as my daughter and heiress. My solicitor, Mr. Farrar, will arrange with Miss Bowles for your immediate departure, and you will hear from my sister upon the subject. I shall expect a letter from you as soon as you are settled with your aunt, and hope you will write very fully. By keeping up a correspondence with you I shall hope to know a great deal more of my daughter by the time I return to England. Meantime, your affectionate father,

"OLIVER RAYMOND."

"Oh, Sarah! how shall I be able to bear it? A father and aunt and cousins all at once! I'm too happy."

"You'll soon get used to it, miss; people are never too happy for long together," philosophically returned Sarah.

Jean sat with her elbows on her knees and her chin between her hands, trying to realize her good fortune. It was not easy to imagine herself free, and with ties like other people, after nearly fourteen dreary, colorless years at Ivy Lodge. Although surrounded by happy girls of her own age, her life had been almost as isolated as if she had been on a desert island. Miss Bowles prided herself upon her conscientiousness in obeying to the letter her instructions respecting Jean. Moreover, as there had been always a haze about the girl's parentage, Mr. Farrar having declined any discussion upon the subject, Miss Bowles had considered it her duty to discourage any thing in the shape of close companionship between Jean and her other young ladies, who, her prospectus set forth, were the "daughters of gentlemen only." Did there appear any tendency toward forming a friendship, the young lady, whoever she might be, was invited to a *l'été-à-l'été* with Miss Bowles, after which it invariably happened that Jean lost her friend. The girls were not unkind to her; but, with the careless light-heartedness of youth, accepted her inferiority as a matter of course. It was evident enough that she was different from themselves. No friends came to see her, her holidays were all spent at Ivy Lodge, and her dress was always of the cheapest and shabbiest. The general impression was that she must be a poor relation, on whom food and clothing were grudgingly bestowed out of charity. Of course she would not have had to help with the younger girls, and do so many things which others did not, if her education had been paid for. Then her dreary, loveless life prevented her from being able to enter into their feelings about the world outside Ivy Lodge; and, in her inability to picture a home and family group, she asked such absurd questions, and had such very exalted unreal notions about the love between brothers and sisters! Added to her other deficiencies, she was not considered remarkable for amiability.

When the clock struck nine, from force of habit Jean sprung to her feet and ran down to morning study, slipping her treasure into the bosom of her frock as she ran. But, instead of seeing the pupils in their accustomed places, silently bending over their tasks, she found them laughing and chatting in high glee—no sign of study to be seen.

"Here she is!" they exclaimed, eagerly pressing round her as she entered the room. "Oh, Jean, Bowles has given us a whole holiday because of it! Do tell us if it's true! She says you are going to be enormously

rich, and that your father is a gentleman, and your aunt a dean's daughter!"

In truth, Miss Bowles had been not a little glad to be able to explain that her doubtful pupil was so respectable, after all.

"Yes; it is true."

"Won't Bowles be fine to you now! Do tell us all about it!"

But Jean was shy—shyer now than they had ever known her, and so quiet; although they could tell, by her shining eyes and quivering lips, that it was true.

"She says that your papa has been in India all the while, and that letter was from him."

"Yes; and it begins, 'My dear Daughter,'" whispered happy Jean.

"Oh, that of course!" their eyes eagerly asking, "And what next?"

But she did not appear inclined to tell, or indeed to talk at all. She could not be so suddenly on familiar terms with them as they could be with her. She had not been accustomed to exchange confidences, as were they with each other, and felt strange and awkward with them. As soon as she could, she made an excuse for escaping to the dormitory again. Miss Bowles had said that to-morrow might bring a letter from her aunt. What would her aunt be like—kind and loving, like Rose Wylee's, who gave her two kisses when she came to see her? Then she began to torment herself with doubts and fears. How if her aunt should not like her, and refuse to receive her into her home? She remembered that hitherto no one had found her worth loving, and fell into despondency lest, after all, she should be obliged to spend her life at Ivy Lodge. How terrible the prospect looked now! It had seemed dreary enough before, but to be thrust out of paradise after only one glimpse at it! Already realizing the truth of Sarah's philosophy, she passed the day in a state of anxiety almost bordering upon misery, afraid to indulge the hope that such wondrous good fortune could be really meant for her, and yet more afraid to think of the future if it were not. The girls could not persuade her to go down and enjoy the holiday with them, though they whispered promises of all sorts of surreptitious treats. She entreated to be left alone, and spent the hours sitting on the floor in a corner of the bedroom, unheeding their laughter at Jean's method of coming into her fortune!

Miss Bowles serenely approved of Jean's woe-begone aspect, and took occasion to point out to her dear young ladies that they should remember poor Miss Bell had to leave Ivy Lodge, and naturally dreaded the separation from the friend and instructress of her youth.

At which her "dear young ladies" declared among themselves that Jean was even stupider than they had given her

credit for being. But she would have cared nothing about their verdict had she heard it. Her whole being was filled with one idea, and she was too abstracted to notice what was going on around her. When night came she laid her head upon her pillow in a whirl of confusion. "Ah, the long, weary hours before morning! How ever should she get through them?" But the healthy reaction from a day's excitement soon set in, and she fell into a sound, dreamless sleep, from which she was only awakened by the six-o'clock bell. She sprang up in bed and looked about her with wild eyes. "Was it only a dream—was it?" But she was very quickly re-assured by her companions beginning once more to talk over her good-fortune. She had but two hours now to wait until post-time, and they were got through at last.

Miss Bowles smilingly put a letter into her hand. "From your aunt, no doubt, my dear."

Jean took it from her hand and ran off to her corner with it. It was from Mrs. Poynder:

"MY DEAR NIECE,—A letter received this morning from my brother informs me of your relation to him and us. I hasten to write to you, very much regretting that he has not before given me the opportunity to know you. My dear children and I are longing to welcome you to our hearts and home, and trust you will lose no time in coming to us. I regret not being able to fetch you, having unfortunately been suffering from a neuralgic attack, and feeling a little afraid of the journey just now. I find there is a train due at Raystone station at four o'clock P.M., and some of us will meet it on the chance of your coming at once, which I hope you will do. With sincerest love from myself and your cousins, your affectionate aunt,  
MARIA POYNDER."

Miss Bowles would have much preferred a longer notice before Jean's removal. If the aunt was aware what sum had been paid with her niece she would be astonished at the shabbiness of her appearance. She had hitherto settled the matter comfortably enough with her own conscience. Had she not been warned against encouraging the girl in extravagant notions? And was she not dressed quite well enough for what was to be her station in life? Nevertheless, Miss Bowles would have preferred a little more time for replenishing before Jean's wardrobe came under critical eyes. But her endeavors to persuade her "dear young friend" to remain a few days longer at Ivy Lodge (she had left off commanding since the arrival of that Indian letter) were quite unavailing. Indeed, Jean was in so restless and excited a state—so entirely different to

her usual self—that Miss Bowles was afraid of serious consequences if she were thwarted very much. So the best that could be done in a few hours was done. Such things as could be got ready-made were purchased, and Jean found herself better dressed than she could remember ever having been before, when she set forth on her journey to Raystone, accompanied as far as the railway station by Sarah, the house-maid.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

"RATHER of the gushing order, I should think, to judge from the telegram mamma received. The clerks at the office must have been highly amused."

"Very bad style to begin upon; but you will get her out of all that. School-girls are all more or less gushing, I suppose."

The speakers are Maud Poynder and Nugent Orme, a visitor, evidently upon familiar terms with the household. Louis Poynder and he have known each other since their boyhood; were together at Eton, at the same college of the university, and imagine themselves to be very much alike and fast friends. But the difference between them, so slight from the point of divergence in their boyhood, is increasing at a more rapid ratio than either is aware of. Should it come to the test, they may find themselves as far asunder as the opposite poles. They are nearly the same age, and both men are considered good-looking; but Nugent Orme has light hair and gray-blue eyes, and his good looks are of a larger and broader type than the other's. His manner is different, too: he talks less and listens more than does Louis Poynder. But he is not so general a favorite. Apt as a boy to believe too much—his ultra-chivalric notions leading him into all sorts of Quixotic extravagance, and making him the dupe of subtler minds—he now appears to be running into quite the opposite extreme of caution and skepticism. Indeed, he seems to delight in airing his cynicism; although he is found more indulgent toward those who attack than to those who confirm it. He is not so easy to get on with, and therefore not so generally liked as is Louis Poynder. Young ladies complain that Mr. Orme is so hard and uncompromising. He is cynical enough himself, but becomes downright rude if another attempts a little satire. He absolutely told little Kate Graham that an irreligious woman was an abomination, when she made a jest in return for one of his own about some point of belief. Then, there is another, and perhaps greater, reason for Louis Poynder being more popular with their lady friends. It has been long known that, if not engaged



to Maud Poynder, Nugent Orme is on the verge of being so. Maud herself thinks he has been on the verge long enough; but she knows him too well to let him see that she thinks so. Why has he hesitated so long? He would have found it difficult to explain. That he admires her more than any woman he has ever seen, is certain. Her fair queenly style of beauty delights his eye, and her refined manners satisfy his somewhat ultra notions respecting her sex. Maud Poynder is always a gentlewoman in her language and bearing; and, moreover, she is an intelligent companion for an educated man, without the least assumption of superiority.

They are waiting in the pretty drawing-room of Fernside the arrival of Jean Raymond, Mrs. Poynder and her son having gone to meet her at the station.

"I wonder what she will be like?" mused Maud. "It seems so odd her coming suddenly to live upon intimate terms with us, without our having the slightest idea of what she really is! And my uncle knows as little as we do. Some mystery seems to be attached to her past history. But in any case it was right for mamma to offer her a home; indeed, I urged her to do so."

"I hope you will be rewarded by finding her pleasant to get on with. Companionable, I am afraid, there is no chance of her being. She can hardly be out of the pin-afore stage of her existence; and if she were more matured it might not be much better. To judge by their conversation, very few women have your tastes"—with a glance at the *Quarterly* she had put down at his entrance.

A faint flush rose to her cheeks. "I am afraid of you when you become complimentary, Nugent." The "Nugent" was whispered low, and her eyes were downcast, the flush spreading over her face.

"I mean something more than compliment," he replied, gazing tenderly down upon her. "Don't you know that I did, Maud?"

Her heart beat fast. At last! After such long waiting and watching, it had come at last!

The sound of an arrival. He drew back the hand extended to take hers. The color faded from her face, and her eyes filled with tears of vexation. But she kept them back and forced a smile to her lips as Mrs. Poynder, her son, and Jean entered the room.

"Welcome to Fernside, my dear. Your Cousin Maud, Jean."

Jean shyly lifted her eyes to the beautiful vision, and placed her hand in the white palm extended toward her.

"Mr. Orme, my dear Jean. My niece, Nugent."

Jean made a stiff little school-room courtesy to the tall figure before her, and stood nerv-

ously plucking at the fingers of her glove, her eyes downcast.

"Perhaps you would like to go to your room at once, my dear?" kindly suggested Mrs. Poynder. "One is always glad to refresh a little after a journey."

"Yes, if you please, Mrs. Poynder."

"You must give me my proper title," returned the elder lady, as she led the way to the room assigned to Jean. "Aunt Maria, you know. Do you think you will like this room, my dear? We thought you might prefer the heath view."

"Oh yes; it is quite beautiful!" ejaculated Jean, gazing delightedly round the really pretty room, with its dainty, luxurious furniture and fine open view from the window—a large bay-window, in which stood the most inviting of lounging-chairs, with a pretty writing-table and a few well-chosen books.

"Your belongings will be brought up here immediately, my dear; and I will send one of the maids to assist you in unpacking. We dine at seven; so you will have ample time to take an hour or two's rest before dressing."

"Thank you," murmured Jean. Then, as Mrs. Poynder was quitting the room, she timidly added, "Would you mind—may I kiss you, Aunt Maria?"

"That you may, my dear!" And Mrs. Poynder heartily returned the shyly offered kiss, tears springing to her eyes as Jean said, "I have never had one before, Aunt Maria."

Mrs. Poynder descended to the drawing-room, entering in the midst of a burst of laughter from the three standing round the fire.

"It is really too bad!" laughed Maud. "Do call them to order, mamma;" adding, to Nugent Orme, "You must not think I am pleased. It is your absurd way of putting it which makes me laugh."

"I do not see any thing to laugh at," said good-natured Mrs. Poynder. "The poor child is only a little awkward at coming among strangers."

"A little awkward!" exclaimed her son.

"Well, Louis, you stared at her so unmercifully, you know."

"Who could help it, mother? I was just telling them what a queer figure she looked, stepping out of the train, courtesying, and answering our questions in copy-slips."

"And Nugent was quite as bad," said Maud, "with his nonsense about bread-and-butter. You ought to take him to task, really, mamma."

"I am afraid I must plead guilty. But the fault is in my training. I have not acquired a taste for bread-and-butter," he said, smiling.

"She is dark, is she not, mamma? Nice-looking, too, I thought; did not you, Nugent?"

"No, I can not say so; but I did not notice particularly."

Then he took leave, and the two young men strolled toward the town.

"Not much alike, the new cousin and Maud, are they, Orme?" said Louis, linking his arm in the other's.

"Not in the slightest degree," very decidedly from Nugent Orme.

Maud was standing with one shapely foot upon the fender, gazing smilingly at the reflection of her fair face in the chimney-glass.

"She is not likely to be troublesome in any way, I think, Maud dear," said Mrs. Poynder, after waiting a few moments for her daughter to begin. "She seems quite humble and child-like. Fancy her asking if she might kiss me, and saying it was the first kiss she had ever received!"

"I think we shall get on with her."

At which Mrs. Poynder's mind was set at rest. She had been more anxious about Maud's verdict than any thing besides.

When Jean came hesitatingly into the drawing-room, a few minutes before seven, she received a very pleasant welcome from the two ladies. They were both too well-bred to let her perceive their surprise at her toilet. She had done her best in the way of tacking a fresh frill in her brown merino dress, which had formed her preparation for fête-days at Ivy Lodge. But she was conscious that, with the exception of a cap and apron, her dress was the same as that worn by the pretty maid-servant who had assisted her to unpack. What a contrast it was to her cousin's demi-toilet: a blue silk, made in the latest style, open at the white throat, and so becomingly adorned with soft ruffles and lace! Then the pale gold hair, how admirably it was arranged to suit the loveliness of the face! Jean quite forgot her own homeliness in her honest admiration of her beautiful cousin. Her very manifest admiration did her more service with Maud than the latter would have acknowledged even to herself.

Louis Poynder entered the dining-room as they were taking their seats at the table, and after a side-glance at the new-comer and a mental shrug at her primitive appearance, gave himself up to the business of dining, without any attempt at conversation. To Jean the dinner seemed a banquet. Miss Bowles's annual party suppers had never equaled this; indeed, they had principally consisted of the thinnest and tiniest of sandwiches and most tasteless of jellies, custards, etc., all plentifully adorned with frills and bows and artificial flowers, and accompanied by the sherry dubbed "Curious." The very aroma of the nice things was new to her; while the flavor of the little she ate was strange and delicious to a palate accustomed only to beef and mutton dressed in the simplest way.

"I am afraid you are not enjoying your dinner, my dear?" kindly said Mrs. Poynder. "Let me send you a little of this curry?"

"Oh yes, indeed! I have never tasted any thing so nice before; only I am not hungry," replied Jean.

Louis Poynder smiled.

On the whole, the dinner was got through pretty well. The girl knew how to use her knife and fork, and she would get more accustomed to things in time, thought Maud.

When they returned to the drawing-room, the three younger of the party gathered round the fire and began to make acquaintance; Mrs. Poynder cooing down in her favorite chair for her accustomed nap.

Maud was a great deal more successful in overcoming Jean's shyness than was her brother. Indeed, Jean seemed in so much awe of him, that at length, after two or three fruitless attempts to draw her into conversation, he said, with a comical look of annoyance,

"Maud seems entirely to absorb you, Cousin Jean; and that is not fair, you know. If you do not say something to me, I shall think I have been unfortunate enough to have begun by making a bad impression."

"Oh no, indeed you have not!" she earnestly ejaculated, quite shocked he should think so. Then, with a shy smile, she added, "It is because I don't know what to say. I never spoke to a gentleman before, except the drawing-master and the curate, and they were both old."

At which he and his sister burst into a hearty laugh, awakening Mrs. Poynder from her nap. They explained to her, and all laughed again in chorus, Jean joining merrily in.

"You must excuse me," presently said Louis; "but I really can not resist the inclination to ask what your first impression of a young man is?"

To be quite honest, Jean fixed her brown eyes on his face for a moment, then gravely replied, "You haven't made any impression."

"Now, really that is discouraging; the first specimen you have seen, too!"

"No; I have seen a great many gentlemen at church and out walking—of course I have. I said I had not talked to one, and you have not said much to me yet, you know."

"I shall consider that a challenge. But I am under the disadvantage of not knowing what kind of talk you prefer."

"I don't know myself, because no one has ever talked to me except Miss Bowles. I don't care for that kind much."

"The school-mistress; rather flavorless, I dare say. But you had companions; and school-girls are not very reticent nor ignorant of what's going on in the world."

"Miss Bowles's young ladies did not talk to me," said Jean. "They did not seem to

like me until it came out that I had a father, and that was only just as I was coming away."

"Why, what a dull, lonely life you must have led!"

"Yes; I know now it was lonely," she said. "But it did not seem so bad at the time, till my father's letter came."

"And you really know nothing of the wicked world? You must be awfully good—I shall be quite afraid of you."

"Because of my being good!" laughed out Jean, her eyes dancing with merriment, and her white teeth glittering in the fire-light. "That is because you don't know. Miss Bowles thought I required more punishing than most girls, because of my natural defects."

Highly amused, he went on with all sorts of absurd questions; his sister only putting in an occasional word when Jean got puzzled and appealed to her. She was quietly making observations for future guidance.

By the time tea was brought in Louis Poynder had come to the conclusion that his endeavors to make himself agreeable to Jean this first night of her arrival (his mother's stipulation, in return for a certain sacrifice on her own part) had not been quite such hard work as he expected it to be.

Once or twice it occurred to him that, inexperienced as she was, and demure and quaint and shy as she looked, she was not quite the simpleton he had at first given her credit for being. Moreover, there was not the faintest semblance of self-consciousness, or what he termed the school-girl coquette in her bearing. He was man of the world enough to recognize that in a very short time.

Mrs. Poynder was quite relieved to find them all getting on so well, and herself began to feel quite affectionate to Jean. She looked at the girl's lithe figure and shapely little head and hands, and thought that when she had got rid of her stiffness, and was dressed like a lady, she might look like one. "We must put you into the dress-maker's hands at once, my dear," she said, when she and her daughter accompanied Jean to her room. "I do not know what sum was paid to Miss Bowles for your dress, but she certainly might have chosen prettier colors, and had your things made in better taste. You are to have an allowance for dress and so forth, are you not, my dear?"

"Yes, Aunt Maria; two hundred a year. Mr. Farrar this morning gave me this check for the first half-year in advance. Will you spend it for me, please?"

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear," ejaculated Mrs. Poynder, her fingers closing over the welcome paper. Here was a little ready cash. Of course the bills for Jean's things could run on for a little while, until more pressing demands were settled.

## CHAPTER IV.

### JEAN'S LETTER.

WHAT an awakening for Jean Raymond the next morning! Aroused by some distant sound from a pleasant morning-dream, and taking it to be the usual summons at Ivy Lodge, she sprung out of bed, and began mechanically to dress before she realized what had taken place, and where she was. What a contrast—this pretty room, with its bright chintz hangings, thick, soft carpet, etc., to the cold, bare dormitory to which she had been accustomed! Was ever girl so happy before? Would she ever get used to it? Kneeling down by the bedside, she tried to put words to the thankfulness that filled her heart. Then, in school-girl fashion, she hurriedly got through the process of dressing, using lots of soap and cold water, and rubbing away afterward until her face crimsoned and shone, and twisting her long, thick hair tightly and neatly about her head. Doubtful whether she ought to leave her room until she was summoned (the ways of a household were so utterly unknown to her), she drew aside the window-curtain and peeped out at her new surroundings. Presently a maid tapped at the door, with hot water and a message. "Her mistress's love, and would Miss Raymond like to breakfast in her own room, or prefer joining the family at nine o'clock?"

Nine! Nearly an hour! Jean looked longingly out at the heath flooded with sunlight, but was too unaccustomed to do a thing because she longed to do it to venture now. She sat down by the window, and, resting her chin on her hands, let her thoughts wander whither they would. Whither they would! Not to take just a tantalizing peep into dream-land, and be called away by the sound of the school-bell, but to wander amidst a garden of delights, plucking a flower here and a flower there at will. No wonder the hour passed swiftly, or that she was afterward complimented upon her happy face when she joined her aunt and cousins, or, rather, they joined her, for it was nearly ten before Louis, the last of the party, made his appearance. He was not, apparently, in so good a humor or so inclined to talk as on the previous evening. His mother eyed him anxiously as he gathered up three or four large business-looking missives by his plate, and thrust them unread into his pocket. Then, suppressing a sigh, and endeavoring to speak cheerfully, Mrs. Poynder turned to Jean.

"You said something about writing to your father this morning, did you not, my dear?"

"Yes, please, Aunt Maria."

"I please any thing and every thing that pleases you, my dear. We all do that."

"Indeed, yes," sweetly assented Mand.

"I hope you will like being with us, Jean (it must be 'Jean' and 'Maud' between us, you know), and you must be sure to say if every thing here is not quite to your satisfaction—will you not? And, mamma, I have been thinking that perhaps Jean would like to have a little independent room of her own—for writing, painting, or what not, you know, Jean. Might not the little room leading out of her bedroom be turned into a study, or, if that sounds too formidable, cozy? What do you say, Jean?"

Jean was too overwhelmed to say much. She could only murmur something about their being too good to her.

"And while you are writing your letter, Maud and I will go into the town and make arrangements with the milliners and people, so that your wardrobe is made more befitting my brother's child as quickly as possible. You will hardly know yourself when you have more becoming things," said Mrs. Poynder.

Then Jean was taken into the luxurious drawing-room, where the spring light was softened by Venetian blinds, and there was just fire enough in the brightly burnished steel grate to bring out the scent of the violets arranged in tiny Sèvres baskets.

"I thought you would prefer this to writing in the library, Jean. I do most of my letter-writing here," said Maud, drawing a small writing-table toward the fire, and placing a chair and footstool before it. "You will find foreign paper and all you require here." Then kissing Jean's cheek, and begging her to give their best love to her "dear uncle," Maud left her alone.

It was a real boon to Jean to have this opportunity of pouring out her gratitude to the father to whom she owed all this. She was too much rejoiced at being acknowledged by him to give one thought to his long delay in doing it. What words could express her deep thankfulness for his love to her—to her who, it might be said, had never tasted happiness before? It was wondrous! After shedding a few delicious tears, she sat down to her labor of love; and beginning with a somewhat incoherent but unmistakably sincere attempt to express her love and gratitude, she went on to give a glowing account of her newly found aunt and cousins, and their goodness to her, not perceiving how very little it took to satisfy one to whom kindness was strange. Dear Aunt Maria and Cousin Louis were so good and kind, and beautiful Cousin Maud so loving! "Oh, papa, dear papa, I only want you to be the very happiest girl in all the world! To think your hands will touch this paper while I am so far away! I am kissing it again and again at the thought. But I must not forget. Miss Bowles said you wished to know what I am like, and what I know, and that I was to tell you myself every thing

very exactly. Dear papa, if I had thought any body cared, how hard I would have striven to be more good and clever than I am. But indeed I will try now to make up for lost time. Miss Bowles said I had more good-conduct marks last half; and that although far from being as even and amiable in my general behavior as could be desired, there was certainly some slight improvement, which, taking my inherent defects into account, was to my credit. Those were as nearly the words as I can recollect. Then my general knowledge is doubtful; French and German, good; singing and drawing and music, commendable; needle-work, dancing, and deportment, bad. But that is not the worst. Dear papa, I hope you will not mind much, but I am afraid I am very plain. I thought I looked quite ugly by the side of Cousin Maud, who is very beautiful. I am tall, for girls, and thin, and my hair and eyes are a sort of yellow (she might have said gold) brown; and I have no color in my cheeks. But dear Aunt Maria is going to buy me some new dresses and things, and she says I shall look much better when I have more becoming clothes. And now I have to tell you what I read and think. I like history and biography best; but I wish they would tell you more about why the things were done. I do not like bad people. No, I am sure not; but I do wish some of the good ones were not quite so proud of their goodness, and felt more sorry for those who have faults. It is so much harder to be good when you have got a lot of inherent defects. But it was not I who tore the leaves out of 'Letters of Advice to my Young Friends at School,' though Miss Bowles thought I did. And if she told you about my 'Letters of Advice to my Young Friends from Fairy-land,' it was only fun, papa dear; and Ellen Thornton need not have told, after asking me to let her read them, need she? Indeed I did not mean any thing wrong, and Miss Bowles herself nearly laughed two or three times when she was reading them; only she said it was waste of paper and a dangerous gift; so I had to be punished. I have read one novel—Rose Wylee left it during the holidays—and I hid myself till it was finished. It was 'Kenilworth,' written by Sir Walter Scott, and the pleasure of it made me ill. The doctor said I had been overexcited: but Miss Bowles said that could not be, and I was afraid to tell her. But, dear papa, I mean to tell you every thing, because your reproof would be better than other people's praise. I will try so hard to be whatever you would have me be. Dear papa, do believe it, as well as in the love of your grateful child,

JEAN."

Folding her letter, and placing it in an envelope, she began to look about her and

admire her surroundings again. The Fernside drawing-room could boast of something better than expensive upholstery. Mrs. Poynder's miniatures, cabinets, and collection of Sèvres and Dresden were all gems of their kind, old heir-looms in her family; and the soft French gray paper of the walls and pale rose-colored hangings had been selected by Maud, to whose artistic taste was also due the absence of gilding or any thing unbecoming a country house. Jean's eyes dwelt lovingly upon the treasures about her. What a beautiful room! How glorious to live always with these beautiful things! Would she ever get used to it?

Then, in the exuberance of her joy and youth and health, she burst into a paean of song, whirling lightly about the chairs and tables, and clapping her hands above her head with girlish glee. Suddenly her eyes caught the reflection in the chimney-glass of a tall figure standing near the door—Mr. Orme, to whom she had been introduced the night before. Coloring furiously, and backing against the wall, she made him a prim little courtesy, and murmured, with downcast eyes, "I beg your pardon," unable for the moment to divest her mind of the impression that some sort of punishment had to follow.

"I ought rather to beg yours, Miss Raymond," he replied, with distant politeness; approving of her demure affectation, as he mentally termed it, quite as little as her previous hoidenism. "Are any of the family in, do you know?"

"No, I think not." Quick to note the shade of disappointment in his face, and anxious to conciliate a friend of her aunt's, she shyly added, "I know my aunt and Cousin Maud have gone into the town; but if you will wait—"

"Thank you, no; I shall probably light upon them somewhere." A *tête-à-tête* with this girl was not to be thought of. "Good-morning, Miss Raymond."

"Good-morning, Mr. Orme." Then, as he unceremoniously closed the door: "But you need not have looked so dreadfully shocked. If you had just found a father and aunt and cousins, and a beautiful fairy home to live in, you might do something quite as silly."

Nugent Orme walked slowly toward the town, and presently met Mrs. Poynder and her daughter returning home. Never had Maud appeared more attractive in his eyes. "I have just called at the cottage," he said, after shaking hands with them.

"Did you go in? Did you see my cousin?"

"Yes; I went into the drawing-room, and found her executing a sort of wild Indian dance; but at sight of me she became the demurest of damsels, making a little prim courtesy, and begging my pardon."

"How ridiculous!"

"You will find her a rather serious undertaking, I fear," he replied, turning to walk with them in a matter-of-course way. Indeed, his attendance upon them dated from so far back that it had come to be taken as a matter of course by every one. The Raystone people had been accustomed to see him upon intimate terms at Fernside since his earliest boyhood; and it was well known that his mother, Lady Alice Orme, had been the friend of Mrs. Poynder's youth. Nugent Orme's father had been the head partner in the Raystone Bank—one of the richest men in the shire—and considered a very good match for the fourth daughter of a poor earl. Moreover, it had been a love-match. When Mr. Orme died, ten years after their marriage, his widow followed him to the grave a few months later, from sheer inability to exist without him, leaving their only son and heir, then six years old, to the guardianship of his father's sister, Miss Orme. The property had been carefully nursed during his minority, and on coming of age Nugent Orme succeeded to a fine estate. Unlike his friend Louis Poynder, he had acquired no expensive habits. Indeed, his aunt affirmed that he was a great deal too simple in his tastes for one in his position. His bedroom was more barely furnished than that of the meanest servant at the Grange, and vain were her endeavors to improve matters. Did she order some little luxury to be placed in his room during the day, it was sure to be found outside the door the next morning. Moreover, she was wont to deplore that her dear Nugent was too lax in his rule over his dependents, affirming that from the steward downward they did almost as they pleased. They would have told a different story. Little as he said, every man and boy on the estate knew he had a master. There was a line beyond which they could not go, and those who appreciated a good place took good care not to attempt it. "As long as you did your duty, or even tried to do it, stupidity he wasn't hard upon; there wasn't a better master breathing than the young squire," said the men; but one and all knew that shirking did not do at the Grange. Then, unmindful as Miss Orme considered him of his responsibilities, did she have one of her managing fits, and take to directing out of her province, a finger was laid on the machinery at once. But it was done so gently—almost imperceptibly—that the little lady fancied she had merely changed her own mind. If Miss Orme had a weakness (she had not the least suspicion that she had), it was for managing every body and every thing about her. Her nephew said he was completely under petticoat government, affirming, to her great delight, that Aunt "Jemmy" was a regular despot, and kept him under her thumb.

Miss Orme highly approved her nephew's

intimacy with the Poynders, and heartily welcomed the idea that Maud would one day be his wife. She was an especial favorite of Miss Orme's. Intellectually superior as she was acknowledged to be, Maud was so gentle and pliant, so appreciative, and, above all, so ready to ask advice, which it was the delight of the little lady's heart to give! She was in the habit of hinting to her intimate friends that dear Maud did nothing without consulting her, and quite believed that she had materially helped to form the young girl's mind. "Every body knew that fitness for the training and management of children was not dear Maria's strong point." Of late, since it had been understood that she was to be Nugent's wife, Miss Orme's efforts had been chiefly directed to fit her for the position, by giving her an insight into his character and the kind of management he required, and dear Maud had listened in the sweetest way. "Nugent is very good, my dear; kind-hearted and generous in the extreme; still he requires management—all men do. It does not do to let them suspect they are being managed, of course. I have always been very careful not to let Nugent perceive that I manage him. His talking about being under my thumb is all nonsense, you know; he does not think it really, and" (with a wise little nod) "I take care to let him have his way in things he cares about."

"You have so much tact and penetration—so different to many women!" would murmur admiring Maud.

"Not at all, my love, not at all. I only use the talent that has been given to me."

Maud was quite sure of an ally in Miss Orme, when an ally should be required. But she was beginning a little impatiently to ask herself when would that be? Her love for Nugent Orme had grown with her growth; from her earliest girlhood it had been her ambition to at least seem what he most admired—in her intense desire for his approbation she had probably striven more to seem than to be. If he should not love her enough to ask her to be his wife after all! She shrank with terror from the thoughts which the bare suspicion called forth. She did not wish to do evil—she would not for evil's sake. If it was possible to find a clean path leading in the direction she wanted to go, she much preferred it to a dirty one. Living a good, stainless life was both pleasanter and in better taste. As Nugent's wife she pictured herself leading the best life; dispensing hospitalities to the county; a kind and considerate mistress to her household; a benefactress to the poor, and devoted to her husband. And she did not overestimate her capabilities. Give her the desire of her heart, and all the rest would follow, and she told herself that, if it were denied her, circumstances, and not she,

would be to blame for the consequences. Why did he not speak? She knew that he cared for her as he had never cared for any other woman, and yet how contentedly he seemed to go on from day to day, ever since his return from the university, without taking a step farther until the day of Jean's arrival; after which he slipped back into his old manner again. She was four-and-twenty, and he three or four years older; there was not the slightest obstacle to their union. Miss Orme would have been delighted to have her dear Maud daily listening to her sage advice, and Mrs. Poynder and her son had the gravest reasons for desiring the match.

## CHAPTER V.

### COLEUR DE ROSE.

JEAN had been three weeks in her new home, and was still in a state of wonder and delight at her good fortune. She found herself welcomed and made much of by her newly found relatives in a way she had hardly dared to hope for. Mrs. Poynder had in her own mind formed a very agreeable plan for settling all difficulties, and preventing her brother's money from being diverted into a fresh channel. Even Maud smiled her approval of the idea, and the happy mother was in a state of complacent good-humor. Whether she had given her son a hint or he had arrived at the conclusion unaided, he had quite recovered the first shock of disappointment about his uncle's change of plan, and was taking matters very philosophically. If Jean had only been more like a certain Jessie, his fate would have been all the easier to accept. But blue eyes, and golden hair, and fascinating ways were not all that was necessary to his happiness.

So, instead of an interloper, Jean found herself a welcome and petted inmate of Fernside. Her aunt and cousins seemed anxious to gratify her lightest wish. She drank deep of the cup that was offered her, never for a moment doubting its being offered in love, and it was perhaps natural enough that one so unaccustomed should be a little overstimulated by the draught. What cared she now for that disagreeable Mr. Orme, who seemed to delight in turning all she said into ridicule? What was there to laugh at in her replying a little doubtfully, "Are you, indeed?" when Miss Joscelyn said she was longing to know more of her? Of course she was surprised, because Miss Joscelyn had not seemed to like her at first.

"Do you think there is any thing to laugh at, Maud?"

"Nugent is amused at your having taken Miss Joscelyn's little effusive speech so literally, Jean," replied Maud, repressing her own inclination to laugh. "Such things are said

as matters of course, and it is usual to reply in the same strain."

"What ought I to have said, then, Maud?"

"One usually replies, 'You are very kind,' or something in that way, to a little *politesse* of that sort, my dear Jean."

"But if she did not mean it, it was not very kind. What nonsense to say she was longing to know me only out of politeness!"

Maud slightly raised her eyebrows, glancing smilingly at Nugent Orme.

He was looking amusedly at Jean. "You will get the credit for being a very severe as well as satirical young lady, if you bring people to book about meaning all they say, Miss Raymond."

"Satirical!" Jean gazed speculatively at him for a moment. "You are satirical. No, I do not want to be that."

He laughed out gleefully as a school-boy, exchanging a glance with Maud, who said, trying to look grave,

"Mr. Orme is not accustomed to young ladies who have only just left school, so you must excuse him, Jean."

"Oh yes, of course. I only wish he would excuse me sometimes—when I make mistakes, you know—instead of laughing at me."

"A fair retort, Miss Raymond. I assure you I feel almost extinguished."

Jean cast a half-puzzled, half-angry look at him as she took up her book, again hardly able to prevent herself telling him in so many words that it would in no way distress her if he were extinguished altogether. But he seemed to read her very thoughts (poor Jean! she did not know how very transparent they were), and laughed out more amusedly than before, trying to get her to attack him again by asking her all sorts of absurd questions. But she only flashed an angry look at him for reply. Why was he always trying to ridicule her like this? If he were only half as pleasant to be with as was Louis! How very different Louis was! He never made fun of her or said any thing unkind when she did the wrong things. "Dear Louis! how nice he is!" she thought. "Aunt Maria is quite right in saying he is always doing something kind and considerate, for he really is."

She felt more at home with Louis than even with Maud, good as the latter was. He was getting more like a dear brother every day. How kind of him to think of getting the new poem for her (she did not know that it was put down to his mother's account), and how kind to be always trying to amuse her when they were *en tête-à-tête*. She expanded more when alone with him than she had done with any one else, telling him all her troubles in the matter of etiquette or what not.

"Oh, Louis, I am so glad you've come! do sit here." "Here" being a chair beside the

stool upon which she was sitting before the fire, embracing her knees in school-girl fashion. "I want you to tell me, please."

"Etiquette again?"

"What ought I to have said when Annie's brother asked me if I would dance with him at the ball? I said, 'Yes, if you please,' but I saw that was wrong in a minute, by the look of his face. Isn't it tiresome not to know such little things? What do girls say to you when you ask them to dance, Louis?"

He looked down amusedly and a little admiringly into the clear brown eyes.

"Well, if they want to dance, they generally say, 'Most happy.'"

"'Most happy.' And if they don't want to, they say, 'No, thank you,' I suppose?"

"No, not precisely. They contrive to be engaged, I believe."

"Get some one else to dance with them."

"Of course a lady could not ask a gentleman, child. They say they are engaged, and trust to fate to bring it true, I expect."

"Oh! How much easier it seems for people who understand etiquette to get out of things, does it not? It must be very useful to know—sometimes." Then, with her chin in hand, gazing musingly into the fire, she went on: "I wonder if I said the right thing to him?"

"To whom, Jean?"

"Mr. Graham, when he said a waltz with me would be *divine*."

"What did you say, Jean?" asked Louis Poynder, bending a little lower, to get a better view of her face.

"Well, I get so laughed at myself, you know—Mr. Orme is always turning what I say into ridicule—that I can feel for others. So I pretended not to know the silliness about *divine*, and said he might have two waltzes if he liked."

He laughed. "Graham intended it to be a compliment, child. With a good partner and good music a waltz may have something *divine* in it."

"Do you think so, Louis dear, really?" opening wide her brown eyes. "I never found any thing *divine* in it at Ivy Lodge. Dancing never used to comfort me a bit," her thoughts reverting to the dreary dancing lessons at that establishment, when she had always been paired with the least-advanced pupil.

"I can only say that I should prefer you to any other girl I know to waltz with," he said, gazing admiringly down into her face. For the moment Jessie was forgotten, and he believed what he said.

"Ah, that is because you like me and I feel the same to you; but there would be nothing *divine* in it!"

"I don't see why there shouldn't. Wait till you've tried a waltz with me."

She gazed straight before her a moment; then replied, very decidedly,

"No, nothing I feel could be intensified into a *divine* pleasure by waltzing; I am sure of it, Louis; and—I should not like it to be."

"If you attain the end, what does it matter about the means, little Puritan?"

He could not but be touched by the nature that was day by day unfolded to him. He was not a little astonished, too, that any human being could afford to let her thoughts be seen as were hers. He frequently found it rather difficult to talk to her. When he tried a compliment, his *amour propre* was offended by her accepting it as a jest, and laughingly giving him a more extravagant one in return; and when he tried a little sentiment, she shut her eyes and begged him to go on, that she might fancy it was the knight in the poem who was saying it. It was all very well sometimes; but the taste which has been fed upon highly seasoned dishes does not readily accustom itself to more simple fare, though the latter may be more healthful; and Louis Poynder still occasionally solaced himself with visits to the vivacious Jessie.

"Pretty Jessie," as she was called by her numerous admirers, brought a great deal of business to her employer, the Raystone pastry-cook—a pink-and-white-complexioned, black-eyebrowed young lady, whose manners matched her vivid style of beauty, and who did not keep the brains of her admirers on the stretch to talk to her. Louis Poynder admired her more than any woman he had ever met. But he was experienced enough to know that young ladies like Jessie do not make the least expensive wives, and have quite as much contempt for love in a cottage as have other people.

He would have to settle down respectfully by-and-by, and marry Cousin Jean. After all, things might have been worse. Jean was a nice sort of girl in her way, and not bad-looking, now she wore more becoming things; though not, of course, to be for a moment compared with Jessie. Graham evidently admired her and Lawrence, besides one or two others who had passed a favorable verdict respecting her. Of course he could take his time about it; and, if by-and-by, when they were married, he found his chain drag a little, it would be easy enough to make his escape for a while by running up to London. None knew better than Louis Poynder how to find amusement according to his taste.

Meanwhile, he was making his way with Jean in a leisurely sort of manner, and never had a moment's doubt of his success; when it should suit him to hasten matters, she would be ready enough to meet him. Mrs. Poynder did her best to help him. She was continually sounding her dear Louis's praises in the young girl's ear, and Maud was as interested about it as she could be about any thing just now, when smiles and sweetness

cost her so much, enduring as she was the heart-sickness of hope deferred. When would Nugent speak the two or three words which were all that was needed now to make things sure? Perhaps it would come about at the Lawrences' party. There would be ample opportunity then, she thought, though she presently remembered, with a sigh, that opportunity had not been lacking before.

It was Jean's first ball—her first introduction into society—and she highly amused the others by her speculations about it.

"I do hope I shall do the right things, dear Aunt Maria. I know now what to say when I am asked to dance; and Louis says I must try not to seem to like it very much or look astonished at any thing."

"He meant that it is not considered well-bred to be demonstrative in any way, my dear."

"Yes; I will try to remember."

As though to fill her cup of pleasure to overflowing, letters from India arrived on the morning of the ball. Jean's satisfied even her large appetite for such food. In truth, her father's heart had been touched by his child's letter. Love was beginning again to put forth buds in Oliver Raymond's heart, and perhaps the best evidence of it was his avoidance of any allusion to money (so long his ruling passion) in his letter to his daughter. It told only of his approval of her writing frankly to him; his desire for their reunion, and hope that she would be a comfort to his old age; his intention to wind up his affairs and return to the Old Country as shortly as possible, etc.; ending with what was intended to be a dry little jest about his regret at her having turned out plain. His letter to his sister was more business-like, informing her that he was going to take immediate steps to have his will prepared, and that his property, bringing in something like four thousand a year, would be left to his daughter, less a provision of three hundred a year for his sister during her lifetime. Under other circumstances Mrs. Poynder would have been inclined to question her brother's justice; but, as she told her son, "It will be all yours, you know, Louis; and dear Maud will not require any thing. Nugent is rich enough to be independent about her bringing him any thing." Could the veil have been lifted from the future for them at that moment!

Many eyes were turned upon the slight girlish figure, simply attired in white, with deep-red roses in her hair, who entered the Lawrences' drawing-room with the Poynder party. Pale with excitement, her brown eyes shining like stars, her sensitive lips quivering in her efforts to suppress her emotion, she clung to her aunt's arm, looking at the scene for a moment in dumb amazement. The dancing was to take place in the conservatory, running the width of the house,



parallel with the drawing-room, which opened into it. The colored lamps, rare exotics, and marble statuary formed a pretty enough picture. To Jean's unaccustomed eyes it was a fairy region of delight. Entirely forgetting her lessons upon etiquette, she ejaculated, "How beautiful! Oh, Aunt Maria! did you ever see any thing so beautiful before?"

Many looked surprised, and a half-envious sigh escaped two or three veterans as they noted her girlish enthusiasm. Enthusiasm was not the thing, to be sure; but the wonder was that any one could feel it in these days, when it is difficult to find a new sensation for a child's party. A girl of ten years would have considered it *infra dig.* to show such astonishment had she been capable of feeling it. But although they could not understand how she had managed to retain it, a few envied the young girl her freshness.

"Can *naïveté* be coming in again?" wondered a languid-looking young lady, eying Jean. "It almost looks like it, her being with the Poynders. They would not encourage bad style."

Faded little Mrs. Talbot, who could not forget that she had once been pretty, and led the Raystone fashions, lifted her thin shoulders, and hinted to a friend that Mrs. Poynder's *protégée* seemed quite unaccustomed to the position she found herself in. But, on the other side, there was old General Markham telling his friend "it did one good to see a girl able to enjoy herself in these days." Even Nugent Orme looked a little curiously at the animated face; but his eyes soon turned to refresh themselves upon the fair, distinguished Maud—a quiet contrast to the other, in her delicate green crape dress, adorned with lilies. Then, fragile and elegant as she looked, he knew that her mental qualities were of a firmer and stronger texture than those of any other woman he had ever met. Yes, he felt that she was the only woman he should ever care to make his wife. He had been telling himself that for the last half-dozen years, and yet he was partly conscious that he felt very little desire to hasten the event. He knew that he was daily and hourly committing himself to marrying her. He had not the slightest wish to avoid doing so, and yet he let the time slip away without ratifying the engagement. Moreover, he made the great mistake of supposing that his lady-love's feelings upon the matter were not any warmer than his own. They were not either of them given to sentiment or romance—that was it. Nugent Orme believed himself quite realistic, looking down upon every thing in the shape of romance. Had she only known it, the slightest impetus on her side would have caused the words she longed to hear to be spoken. But she knew how fastidious he was upon many points, and was afraid to venture.

"How well you look to-night!" he said, bending his eyes admiringly upon her. "All that soft green stuff and the silver things suit you admirably. Your milliner must be quite an artist. Had Undine in her mind, and perceived your fitness to represent her, I fancy."

"I do not think Miss James is poetic enough to idealize her customers to that extent," replied gratified Maud. It was so unusual for him to notice dress. "But I am glad you approve her taste," she added, with a little mental smile at the idea of trusting Miss James to select what she should wear. In truth, none better understood the art of dressing than did Maud Poynder, and none knew better how to conceal the knowledge. She never talked dress but to her dressmaker, and only that person knew how much she studied it. Her exquisitely becoming toilets were more suggestive than obtrusive, and only one very experienced in such matters would have suspected that she had given any thought to them. Had she now been in a company of strangers she would at once have been voted the belle of the evening. But poor Maud was under the disadvantage of having been for ten years the beauty of Raystone, and a beauty of ten years' standing has ceased to astonish. Her reign was still undisputed. Girls knew that, wear what they would, they could never look like Maud Poynder. Nevertheless, many of her own age found themselves happy wives and mothers, while she remained single.

To Jean's surprise, she had scarcely sat down by her aunt's side when she found herself surrounded by gentlemen eagerly soliciting her hand for the forthcoming dances. She delightedly gave them her tablets to fill up as they chose, and when they disagreed among themselves as to who was to have which, frankly informed Edward Lawrence, who appealed to her, that it did not matter in the least—it was all the same to her. Louis Poynder came up only just in time to put in his claim, and rescue her for a couple of dances before she was whirled off in a galop by one of her partners. He had not considered it necessary to make so sure as to name any precise dances they were to have together beforehand, and was not a little surprised to find her caught up in this way. But he was a little gratified too. It gratified him to know that the woman he intended to make his wife found favor in other men's eyes. Still he was puzzled to account for it. There were girls in the room handsomer a deal than Cousin Jean, and her manners certainly did not come up to the regulation pattern. It did not occur to him that the regulation pattern requires to be changed now and then, and that the present one had lasted some time. Anyway, it appeared that a change was welcome. Jean's *naïve* wonder and delight had drawn the

Raystone beaus about her, all eager to dance with a girl who looked as though she would enjoy it. And she did enjoy it—so thoroughly as to cause much lifting of eyebrows by those who were superior to the sensation. Mrs. Poynder was a little dismayed at her niece's too evident enjoyment, but she explained to Miss Orme and two or three other ladies that this was her dear Jean's first ball. "She was quite a child of nature—had only just left the school-room"—and so forth; making excuses for her son's future wife which she would not have done for any other girl.

"Oh, how delightful it is! How much nicer than dancing with girls!" ejaculated happy Jean to her partner, Edward Lawrence, during a few moments' rest in a waltz. They happened to be standing near Maud and Nugent Orme, who were calmly discussing the merits of a new pamphlet.

"I like the tendency, which is rather Berkeleyan, and there is something very fascinating to me in the theory. But how clumsily it is advocated!"

"Very. The critics will not have much trouble with it."

Here Jean's speech broke upon their ears.

"This sort of thing must be an admirable safety-valve for that young lady's energies," he said, smiling. "In self-defense you will have to bring her to a ball now and then."

"You are always so severe upon poor Jean, Nugent."

"I do not admire ecstatic young ladies."

It did not improve matters in Jean's favor when she presently joined her cousin for a few minutes.

"Oh, Maud dear, isn't it delightful? I can hardly bear myself for happiness!"

"You appear to be having lots of dancing, Jean. I told you there would be no lack of partners."

"No; I need not have been afraid, need I? They are all so kind, too, and say such nice things to me. Do not you care for dancing, Maud?"

"Not very much—the round dances; but I have not been quite idle." She had floated gracefully through a couple of quadrilles with Nugent, who was dancer enough to go through them without positive awkwardness, but had declined others, being in truth much more interested in conversing with him than in any thing besides.

Miss Orme, whose tastes and deportment were of the back-board school, was very pronounced indeed in her condemnation of Jean.

"My dear child," had been her aside to Maud, "you will never succeed in imparting a refined tone to that young lady's manners—never. I did not take to her at first, and I am very rarely at fault in my judgment. I am afraid she will prove quite an infliction at Fernside."

"Oh, pray do not speak in that way, dear Miss Orme! I have just been taking Nugent to task for that very thing. He will not allow enough for Jean. She is almost a child—but just out of school, you know."

"It is very kind, and like yourself to defend her, my dear; but I really must take Nugent's side in this matter. Such a contrast!" she murmured to her nephew when Maud went presently to speak to her mother.

"Yes," he absently replied, following Maud with his eyes.

"When am I to congratulate you, Nugent? How happy I shall be to welcome her to the Grange! Dear Maud! our tastes are so congenial!"

He patted the little lady's hand, resting on the arm of the chair, amused at the idea of Maud being any thing beyond kind and tender to his aunt. Congenial! They had not a taste in common!

Jean returned from her first ball with her shoes danced nearly off her feet, her dress limp and torn, a solitary rose hanging in her somewhat disheveled hair, and a general aspect of having danced four-and-twenty dances with scarcely a rest between.

"How could they ever!" she ejaculated, gazing in dismay at the reflection of herself in the dressing-glass, when she reached her room, quite at a loss to account for the bad taste of her partners. But in ten minutes her limp finery was thrown off, her prayers said, and Jean was nestling down on her pillow fast asleep, her cheek upon her father's letter, and a happy smile upon her lips.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ARDSEY GRANGE.

ARDSEY GRANGE—a large, low, irregularly built, ivy-covered old house—is situated about three miles from Raystone. Approached from the main road by two long half-circular drives, from which road, above the thick plantation running parallel with it, there is only a glimpse of its steep roof and quaint chimneys. In front of the house there is lawn enough for two or three croquet-parties, notwithstanding the great cedars and old-fashioned basket-groups of flowers. But it is the south side, or back of the house, which is its pride and glory. From the drawing-room and library windows commences a broad stretch of green sward, bordered by a triple row of fine elms, widening grandly out toward the opposite extremity, and disclosing a beautiful open view of the country and distant wave of hills. The majestic old trees, in which innumerable rooks have for ages built undisturbed, are a fine setting to the soft, swelling landscape beyond; and the whole forms a picture scarcely to be matched for love.

ness. The old Grange itself might have few admirers in these days, when romance is at a discount, and gorgeous "palatial residences" are considered to be indispensable adjuncts of wealth, but its surroundings there could be no question about. The Ormes have owned the Grange for many succeeding generations, and are quite as attached to the old house as they are to its surroundings, never attempting any thing in the way of improvement beyond keeping it in good repair. Its internal aspect is in keeping with the character of the house. A modern fine lady would be highly amused at the long drawing-room, with its spindle-legged furniture, out-of-date chintz, lack of gilding, and endless other evidences of fashion being either unknown or disregarded at the Grange.

The very suggestion of gas would have been an offense to Miss Orme; and the furniture, not being conducive to lounging habits, was, in her estimation, a proof of its superiority over modern inventions. If her fashionable friends regarded her as quaint and behind the times, Miss Orme had her consolations. In the matter of garden-parties it was generally acknowledged that none could compete with her. More matches were made at the Grange garden-fête than at all the other gatherings in the county; and, naturally, none were so popular. That the beautiful grounds and woods might have something to do with the success of her parties did not enter into Miss Orme's calculations. She believed it was all owing to her superior tact and management.

In their every-day life the aunt and nephew saw very little of each other. During the years they had been separated, while he was at school or college, the little lady had occupied herself according to her own taste; and when he returned to the Grange, "dear Nugent" proved too kind and unselfish to wish her to change her habits. Elaborately prepared for the work, with thick shoes, garden-gloves, and sun-bonnet, armed with a pair of scissors, and carrying a basket for her nippings, she trotted about the grounds, holding grave discussions with old Saunders, the head-gardener, over her flowers. "As good a gardener, under proper supervision, as could be desired was Saunders," said Miss Orme to her friends; and "as good a mistress as ever stepped, when she was properly managed," said Saunders to his friends.

Then there was the dearly prized old china to be tenderly dusted (no house-maid's hands were allowed to touch it), visits to pay and receive, consultations with the housekeeper, the daily drive, and a certain amount of knitting to be got through during the day. Altogether Miss Orme felt that her life was a very important one. When her nephew returned to reside at the Grange, she had considered it her duty to

spare him some portion of her time, arranging in her own mind to devote at least a couple of hours a day to cheer him with her society. She commenced by taking her knitting into the library, where he spent most of his time. But, unfortunately, he always happened to be smoking furiously when she entered the room, and she found herself enveloped in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, the smell of which made her head ache dreadfully. She bravely tried to endure, but was at length compelled to give him a hint that he really must excuse her paying him any more visits there unless he gave up smoking. Dear Nugent must be aware how very anxious she was to do her duty, and how painful it was to her to complain, but she was quite unable to endure the smell of tobacco.

Then it came out that the habit was necessary for his health. He had a tendency to suffer from irritation of the nerve tissues, which nothing but tobacco would allay, and therefore he dared not discontinue his pipe. After which little confidence Miss Orme not only ceased to make objection, but became exceedingly anxious in her inquiries each evening whether he had taken his pipe, been very careful as to the exact quantity to be used, and so forth. But, as she could not succeed in overcoming her repugnance to the tobacco, dear Nugent was good enough to excuse her visiting him in the library.

Although the Grange library can not be said to be altogether a model one, according to modern ideas, it is large and cheerful, its oriel-windows commanding the south view. Moreover, it has the general comfortable appearance of being constantly used; and, to judge by the new books, pamphlets, etc., lying on the table, Nugent Orme is quite as much interested in the literature of the present as the past. It is, perhaps, just as well for her peace that Miss Orme is unable to visit the library, and is consequently unaware of the kind of reading her nephew indulges in. "Tell me what books are lying about his private room, and I will tell you the man," would utterly fail in application to Nugent Orme, so opposite are the opinions represented. Every important question of the day—religious, political, and social—is represented upon his library-table, with all the best opinions for and against it; and the marginal notes indicate that the reader is in the habit of carefully sifting and weighing evidence.

Great mistakes might be made by a superficial observer as to Nugent Orme's own tastes and opinions, and it must be acknowledged that he takes no trouble to enlighten people; it may be, even a little enjoying the idea of mystifying them. But whatever his private defection from orthodoxy may be, he is ready to respect the belief of others. The old rector of Raystone always meets

with respect and consideration from the son of his old friend.

"Dear, dear! I am sorry to find this here, boy!" he ejaculates, taking up a fierce raid against Church and State.

"And this," quietly returns Nugent Orme, putting before him as fierce a reply.

"I see. Well, well, it seems the practice now to get at things by roundabout ways."

"We have not all the capability for going the direct road, like yourself, Dr. Brayleigh. You must try to be indulgent to me if I get what I want in the best way I can."

"Only be sure you want the right thing, boy." And the old rector would depart in the most friendly way, comforting himself with the hope that the boy was feeling his way to a belief, and that he was sound at the core, Colenso and all the rest of them notwithstanding. "But it was a sad mistake this ranging, speculative habit of reading and thinking. Nugent had, unfortunately, got into the wrong set at the university."

"What a fellow you are, Orme!" said Louis Poynder, who had lounged in for an hour, and was turning over the last importation of books upon the table. "What man but you would go into all this bosh?"—adding, as he glanced over the authors' names, "Swedenborg, Berkeley, and Reichenbach; what's to be got out of these?"

"That's what I am trying to find out," laughed Nugent Orme.

"I call you an awful example of the uselessness of becoming a reading man—always traveling roads that lead nowhere."

"I get the advantage of change of scene, anyway. Besides, you haven't acquired the right to throw stones yet, old man. You are an example that non-reading does not insure settled convictions."

"Settled convictions! I leave all that sort of thing to the women and old Brayleigh." Which speech, could they have heard it, would have not a little surprised his lady friends and the old doctor; for Louis Poynder was a great deal more observant of the ceremonies of religion than Nugent Orme, and famed for his chivalrous attention to women. Indeed, Nugent Orme occasionally takes him to task for his excessive deference toward them.

"I can't conceive how it is they put up with all that humbug, Poynder. How is it that they don't see such excessive deference in small things is more like a covert satire than a compliment?" he one day replied to a reminder from Louis that he had omitted to render some small service to his hostess at a dinner-party the night before. "Couldn't she see that it would be no compliment to suppose her incapable of doing such a trifle as that without my assistance?"

"But, you see, it's the correct thing to offer, and they know they never look so bewitching as when they are helpless."

"Not to me."

"But when one is at Rome, you know. Fancy your asking Mrs. Wryville's opinion about 'Comparative Mythology'—Mrs. Wryville, who was never suspected of an idea beyond millinery!"

"That's her lookout. It was certainly no ill compliment to suppose her competent to give an opinion. Your sister is well up in most of the questions afloat. Your"—there was a slight emphasis upon the word—"estimate of women seems none of the highest, and I can't conceive how it is that they don't find you out."

When the two were alone together each entirely changed his tone, the one seeming to have dropped his cynicism, and the other taken it up. Louis laughed, stretching out his feet on the hearth-rug as he lay back in the comfortable lounging-chair, jingling the loose silver in his pockets. "It's because I understand them better. I don't take them *au grand sérieux*, as you do, old man, and give them what they want. Why, I never heard you pay a woman a compliment—not even to little Jessie."

"When I begin, it won't be to one of her stamp."

"Ah, you are so awfully strait-laced; so—" Suddenly recollecting his sister, he added, good-humoredly, "All the better for the wife by-and-by, eh!"

"If she has the taste to approve of a strait-laced husband."

"Well, fortunately for me, Jean will not be very *exigeante* in that way, I fancy."

"Your cousin? Jean—that child! You are not thinking of her, Poynder?"

"Yes, I am, rather. But"—he went on more frankly than he had ever yet spoken to the other—"pray don't give me credit for more softness than I possess, old fellow. It's not a question of choice."

"I do not understand."

"Circumstances have turned out awfully against me, Orme; and there is no hope of my righting myself now unless I marry her."

"Then you do not care for her?" asked Nugent, running a paper-knife slowly through the leaves of a pamphlet he held in his hand, his eyes gravely downcast.

"I must marry her, Orme." Suddenly the latter's blue eyes seemed turned to steel, flashing a warning into the other's face. "No, no," he went on hurriedly, "it's—it's a question of money. What an ass I am!" he thought, as it suddenly occurred to him that he had drifted into saying just what he ought not to have said—what he had been especially warned by his mother and sister not to say to Nugent Orme. But, having gone so far, he blundered on, hot and confused in the endeavor to explain matters a little. "The truth is, we have been very scurvily treated, Orme. As long as I can remember, my uncle has led us to expect that

he would make me his heir; and knowing my mother's means were small, he has made her a very good allowance since my father's death. But a few months ago he stops the supplies, and coolly informs us that he has been married some years, and has a daughter at school in England, whom he intends to make his heir. You will allow that it's awfully unjust and hard upon us."

Nugent Orme listened a little abstractedly. He had imagined that the Poynders and himself were like one family. How was it that he had received no hint of all this before? Who had first given him the impression that Mrs. Poynder had offered her niece a home purely out of kindness? But he put the uncomfortable doubt aside, and replied, "Yes, I think it is; but—two wrongs don't make a right, old man; and I don't see why your cousin should have to pay for her father's injustice by being married to a man who doesn't care about her. A moment, Poynder. There ought not to be the slightest hesitation or difficulty between you and me in money matters. Of course, you'll take whatever you want for a start in life out of my superabundance? You know I don't get through a quarter of my income. In truth, I am ashamed of having so much idle money in hand, and shall be glad if you will take whatever you require. Hadn't you a fancy for—"

"I'm past the age for serving apprenticeships," moodily replied Louis, "and—I can't take your money."

Nugent Orme was silent, gravely cutting a few more pages of his pamphlet, the lines about his mouth tightening a little. Half perceiving his thought, the other went on:

"She's my cousin, after all; and though I do not pretend to be deeply in love with her, no one could dislike Jean."

"Would you marry her if the case were reversed, and the money came to you after all?"

"If you put me in a corner like that, no." Then, in the recklessness of his discontent, he went on: "If the money were mine, I would marry little Jessie to-morrow."

"Jessie!"

"Why not?" a little sullenly.

Nugent Orme stared at him for a few moments, quite speechless. Then his face cleared again, and he said, with a smile, "I advise you to take a blue-pill, Poynder."

"Don't talk like a fool. I am in earnest, if you are not."

"In earnest! Nugent Orme's eyes fell, and a gray shade crept over his face, his hand wandering aimlessly among the papers on the table by his side. As men of his calibre are apt to do, he had taken a great deal for granted in his friend; and in fact Louis Poynder had always hitherto been a good-humored and at times brilliant companion, his gayer and more buoyant nature having

its attractions for such as Nugent Orme. Untroubled with doubts, he gayly accepted the world as he found it, passing his time in a good-humored flirtation with religious, political, and social questions, as many consider it best philosophy to do. Moreover, he had not until the last few months been inclined to carp at other people's ways, however much they might differ from his own. Nugent Orme's serious way of taking up things had been a standing jest with him, and, indeed, his frequent exclamation, "What's the good of going into things to such an extent, old fellow? one only gets more skeptical," had seemed to have some philosophy in it to one arduously making his way through a slough of doubt. It would have been absolutely impossible for Nugent Orme to pass through life as the other had been doing, and yet he had frequently envied him his capacity for taking things as he found them. But the capacity seemed to have treacherously failed Louis Poynder in the hour of need. His philosophy had speedily collapsed under the pressure of circumstances—circumstances which would have brought the other's latent power to the surface, and given his mind just the impetus it needed. Nugent Orme was himself half conscious that he would have welcomed a challenge to wrestle a fall with Fortune; and, judging from the other's light-hearted acceptance of things as they were, he had given him credit for greater power of recovery after the blow. Suddenly had come this revelation. The friend whom he had looked upon as a brother—Maud's brother—and whose easy nature he had considered so much more enviable than his own carping one, had succumbed under the first blow. That Louis Poynder could contemplate marrying his cousin for her money, and, if he had had money, would have chosen a girl whom he himself had always regarded as a painted doll, without an idea in her be-trimmed and befrizzled head—a girl ready to bandy jokes with any man who chose to address her—came like a shock upon him.

"It's all very well for you, Orme," presently went on Louis Poynder; "I dare say you are virtuously shocked, and all that sort of thing. You know you are always orthodox where other people are lax, and lax where other people are orthodox; but just try to suppose yourself in my position—I am sure you would do the same thing. Come, don't you think you would—honestly, now?"

Nugent Orme looked hesitatingly into the other's face. "It's not for me to say, Poynder. I'm not a shining light, as you know, and I don't want to assume that I should do the right thing under pressure; but I can certainly conceive something better than marrying a girl one does not care about for the sake of her money. A moment, old man

—I must go on now, and have done with it. Marrying the other seems to me even worse. How could you introduce a person like that to your mother and sister? How could you expect them to receive her?"

"I am not likely to have the chance of putting them to the test," moodily returned Louis Poynder.

"So far good; and, in the event of your cousin being fancy-free, you will find a couple of thousand placed to your account at the bank; it will be managed all right by my London man of business, and paid in as the debt it is. It will never be touched if you do not claim it; and you must know I don't want you to confine yourself to that sum, if you will only be friendly enough to take more."

"Would you take it from me, if our positions were reversed?"

"Yes, I would, and set to work with it at once," heartily.

The "set to work" grated harshly upon the other's ears, and he replied a little constrainedly, "I don't see why I should accept money from you, if I am too immaculate to accept it from my wife."

"But in the event of your cousin not—"

"If you mean she might not care for me, I am not at all disturbed on that score. My only fear is that she might prove a trifle too affectionate." Then, rising from his seat, he added, a little awkwardly, "Are you coming into the town, Orme?"

"No, not this morning," rather stiffly. Yet he followed the other out, and walked with him as far as the road, eying him wistfully now and again, as each tried to get into the old groove of talk again, and tried in vain. For other reasons, both were very much disturbed at what had taken place. Louis Poynder was angry with himself for having spoken so openly, and the latter felt as though he were bidding good-bye forever to the friend, or rather the illusion, of his boyhood. He stood hesitating, an almost womanish pleading in his eyes, when at length Louis Poynder passed into the road and swung the gate between them, as if he still hoped to hear the other recant and declare all he had said was "mere moonshine, to set your back up, old fellow"—a way of getting out of a difficulty which had been adopted upon other occasions. Louis looked straight along the road, only desirous to get away as quickly and pleasantly as possible.

"You won't come, then?"

"No; I want to look over that pamphlet."

"Well, you'll look us up presently, I suppose?" called out Louis, as he went briskly along the road.

Nugent turned back, walked slowly toward the house again, and in a few minutes all trace of weakness was gone. A hard, cynical smile was on his lips, and he look-

ed altogether in what his aunt termed "one of her dear Nugent's unsatisfactory moods." It so happened, too, that he came upon the little lady walking briskly down the drive on her way out.

"Something important, Aunt Jemmy?" Now, Miss Orme had a great objection to this curtailment of her name, which was *Jemima*; and though she was too much absorbed to protest against it at the moment, it jarred upon her very unpleasantly.

"Very important indeed, Nugent," she replied, with a solemn shake of her head. "I am going to the rectory."

"So far! Why not have had the carriage?"

"I could not wait. It is to follow, and take me up on the road."

"In that case your walking will not expedite matters, and you might just as well start in the carriage."

"It was necessary to go at once," she rather irrelevantly replied, in her anxiety to make him understand how very important her mission was, and perhaps not altogether averse to being questioned about it, notwithstanding her mysterious air.

"Ah!" with a half-suppressed yawn.

How trying Nugent was when he put on that air of not caring for things! It really was a defect to be so unsympathetic.

"I hope you will excuse my not entering into particulars until I have seen the rector, Nugent?"

"Oh yes, certainly," still rather absently, as he walked toward the gate with her.

"You see, my dear boy, there are questions which by right of his office a clergyman is more fit than any one else to discuss."

"Yes, I suppose so, Aunt Jemmy."

"And I need not tell you that Dr. Brayleigh may be safely trusted in the most important matters." Then she added, earnestly, "But I assure you I do not intend to keep any thing from your knowledge, Nugent."

"You are quite sure, aunt?" he replied, with a very serious face.

"My dear boy," ejaculated the little lady, quite distressed, "I would not for the world have you believe that I wish to keep you in ignorance of any thing I do. I quite intend to explain at luncheon."

"Then I will try to wait patiently," he replied, opening the gate for her.

"Only two hours, you know, Nugent dear."

"All right, Aunt Jemmy."

"You see, it was such a serious thing to occur in a house. I saw at once that no time must be lost, if the girl is to be saved, although the responsibility is enormous."

"Ah!" with a side-look into the earnest little face.

"E-normous!" she repeated, in high feather. "When Ford told me just now that he

had been seen on several occasions talking to the girl—"

"He—Dr. Brayleigh?"

"No, no; John Wild, the under-gardener. And when Ford told me that he was a Roman Catholic, and frequently having interviews with Mary, I saw the danger at once."

"Mary? Are you speaking about the under-house-maid?"

"Yes; and if you happen to meet John Wild it would be well to give him a hint that he can not be permitted to hold any further communication with her, Nugent—at least for the present—until she has had two or three interviews with the rector, and been advised how to reply to him."

"You are too late, Aunt Jemmy. Only this morning Wild himself was talking about her to me, and I gave my hearty concurrence to his seeing a great deal more instead of less of her."

Miss Orme stopped, looking blankly up into her nephew's face.

"You gave him permission to—to proseytize her?"

"So far as marrying her goes, Aunt Jemmy. He tells me that they can live very comfortably upon his wages at the North Lodge, and that they have both saved enough to start fairly with."

"Marry her?" ejaculated Miss Orme, in the greatest astonishment. It had not once entered into the little lady's head that the interviews between John and Mary had been employed in love-making instead of doctrinal discussions. Never had she felt more crest-fallen. But she presently remembered the fact of the man being a Roman Catholic. "You will never stand quietly by and see the poor girl drawn into such a marriage, Nugent? Think of the consequences to her. I am sure you did not know that he was not a Protestant when you gave your permission. You would never forgive yourself if she were lost through your negligence."

"But how if Wild gets lost?"

"He is quite different. There would be no fear of his being lost if he thought right, you know."

"Ah! there is something in that, only it brings us back to Mary, you see. We must let them take their chance, I think, Aunt Jemmy." Looking down at the little lady's anxious, perplexed face, he went on kindly: "But I really think you can do very well without Dr. Brayleigh's help in the matter. It requires judicious management, to be sure. People don't like having their religious opinions interfered with, and if it's done at all it requires very delicate manipulation. But if you went warily to work—say by making Mary a present of the little tract, 'Truth in a Nutshell,' which you gave me—it might, I think, be more effectual than discussion. Indeed, I think it would be assuming a

more dignified attitude to say nothing, simply leaving the tract to make its own way, as you did in my case, you know."

"My dear boy!" ejaculated the little lady, with a delighted look, "if I had only known! There are many others, 'The Believer's Help,' and the—"

"You are very kind, but that would be retrograding, you know. The help should have come first. After getting the truth into a so delightfully condensed form as to lie in a nutshell, one is independent of all the rest."

"Really, Nugent, I never know whether you are in earnest or not. If you are not now, I must remind you that jesting upon sacred subjects is, to say the least, in very bad taste."

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Jemmy, so it is. There's something wrong about me this morning, I think."

"It is an east wind, my dear boy, and I dare say you are feeling the ill effects upon your nerve-tissues," she replied, looking tenderly up at the great frame. "Have you had your tobacco this morning, dear—the right quantity?"

"A couple of pipes or so, aunt."

"Do you think you get the right kind at Raystone, dear? Wouldn't it be better to have it forwarded direct from town?" she anxiously inquired.

"Oh yes, it's all right," he replied, a little consciously, ashamed of what he mentally termed his humbug; though he told himself she would have it. Presently he went on: "You are quite sure Wild is a Catholic, aunt?"

Miss Orme considered a few moments. Was she quite sure? Now she came to think of it, Ford had hinted something about Mary having intended to live single before she said, "But John Wild is endeavoring to give her a different belief now, ma'am."

"No, I can not say that Ford told me in so many words, Nugent; but she said that John Wild was trying to give Mary a different belief. And—oh yes, Ford said he had given her a cross. Still," the little lady went on hurriedly, "I think with you, Nugent. I am quite equal to managing the affair without troubling Dr. Brayleigh. There can be no harm in giving Mary the tract to begin with; and, if she appears properly impressed, I shall let the matter rest until I hear more."

"A very judicious course, Aunt Jemmy."

Whereat the little lady turned back toward the house in a very complacent frame of mind. "Dear Nugent! it was so kind and good of him to say that! Some people were unwilling to allow that any thing was judicious unless it were suggested by themselves!"

## CHAPTER VII.

## AT THE FÊTE.

MANY of the Raystone elect still held to their first verdict respecting Jean, while Mrs. Poynder's goodness and generosity in giving her a home, and accepting all the consequent responsibility and trouble, were lauded to the skies. Happy, unconscious Jean! Her existence went on as blithely as though the Raystone verdict had been in her favor. She was still overwhelmed with her good fortune, and, in truth, there was little to complain of had she been inclined to be *exigeante*. Although she had not made much way with the elder portion of the community, she very quickly found favor in the eyes of the younger, and was much too happy to be critical as to the cause, readily enough ascribing it all to their goodness. She was in a continual state of wonder at people's goodness; and as to the world, why, it was an enchanted garden of delights, old Dr. Brayleigh's warnings about the danger of loving it notwithstanding. It was such a dear, beautiful old world—that lovely sweep of green turf with the shadows chasing each other over it, and the trees and— and every thing. Surely the Giver of it all could not be angry with her for loving it, she thought, ignorant of the dark shadow of evil which is typified by the word in the pulpit. In truth, her religion was as yet but the poetic sentiment of the young and untried, to whom evil is only a name. Such of her young acquaintances as did not seek her for her own sake were glad to catch at an excuse for dropping in at Fernside on their way to the heath, the favorite walk out of Raystone. Though they liked going to the cottage, where they frequently met Louis Poynder and other of the Raystone young men, they were a little afraid of beautiful, clever, but occasionally rather too sarcastic Maud. But Jean was soon voted “a dear” among the young girls of Mrs. Poynder's set. Her quaint surprise at their wonderful toilets, and their astonishment at her old-fashioned simplicity, caused endless fun between them.

“Not a bit up to things, you know; but a real dear!” said Annie Lawrence, who, in her innocence and ignorance, prided herself upon being “up to things,” because it was the fashion so to seem: a frank, kind-hearted, thoroughly good girl, to whom no man for a moment imputed the knowledge which her manners and style of dress seemed to imply. Indeed, her brother and his friends were rather too apt to encourage her for their own private delectation, as being so amusing a contrast to the reality. Annie Lawrence and Ellen Brayleigh, the old rector's granddaughter, left in his charge by her parents in India, very soon called themselves Jean's especial friends, upon sufficiently intimate terms to invite her to join in their walking

expeditions. Maud and her mother quite approved; the former was not often in the mood to bring herself down to the level of a romantic school-girl, and Mrs. Poynder found her niece a too good walker, and a too exuberant companion, for one of her years. Had they imagined how frequently, as time went on, Edward Lawrence and Arthur Brayleigh joined their sisters, they would not have been quite so easy upon the point. It was unconscious Jean herself who gave them the first hint of danger.

“Edward Lawrence again did you say, my dear?” asked Mrs. Poynder one day at dinner, when Jean had been detailing the afternoon's adventures.

“Yes, auntie; we nearly always meet him now—Mr. Brayleigh and him—and it is so nice. Fancy our walking all the way to Ashleigh and back—much farther than going straight to Ardsey Grange, you know. The funniest little village, isn't it, auntie, with its rough stone cottages and two shops? We asked for some water at one of the cottages, and Edward Lawrence broke the cup afterward, so that no one else should use it. The poor woman looked so shocked, and I was so vexed; but he promised to buy her a new tea-service, and I am to choose it in the town.”

Mrs. Poynder finished her dinner with a very grave face, beginning now to suspect why Edward Lawrence displayed so sudden an accession of friendship for the inmates of Fernside. When Jean and Maud quit the room, she availed herself of the opportunity to warn her son that he had no time to lose if he wished to prevent the other from making further advances.

He laughed. “All right, mother; I'm not afraid of being cut out by Lawrence. I shall walk over the ground when it suits me. She'll be none the worse for having a little flirtation—won't be quite so namby-pamby when I take her in hand, perhaps.”

“But it may not stop at flirtation, you know,” said the anxious mother. “Indeed, I do not think she is the kind of girl to flirt at all.”

“I'm not afraid.”

Wherewith his mother tried to feel content. Her son fully believed that when he chose to walk over the ground, as he termed it, there would not be the slightest obstacle to prevent his doing so. Nevertheless, his mother's hint was not entirely lost upon him, and he began to make a few lazy advances. Then he found that the task was not quite so easy a one as he had expected it to be. It was very difficult, indeed, to be lover-like to Jean. Did he become a little *empressé*, straightway she was openly affectionate, and the difficulty was that the vainest man in existence could not for a moment have been mistaken as to what kind of affection it was. Louis Poynder's self-love



was not a little wounded at her evident freedom from any symptom of caring for him, in the way he had taken it as a matter of course she would care. He soon began to feel quite irritated at the frank affection which was more than cousinly (in her ignorance, Jean exaggerated their relationship into the closer one of brother and sister), and was yet so far from being lover-like.

"What are you reading now, Jean? You ought not to strain your eyes like that."

She had taken her book to the window, to use up the last bit of fading light.

"One minute, please, Louis. They are just going into the cave."

"You are always poring over some book."

She was indeed rarely to be seen without a book in her hand, reading with the greatest avidity any thing and every thing that came in her way. Maud selected the books that came from the London library, and they were of the solidest; but Jean had ransacked the house, and come upon a store of old poems and romances; and she was already on familiar terms with Shakespeare, Spenser, the Chevalier Bayard, Goldsmith, Jane Austen, etc.

She shut the book with a low sigh, and laid her cheek caressingly upon it, her eyes wandering dreamily over the heath.

"You seem to prefer any thing to listening to me," he presently added, rather sullenly.

She turned impulsively toward him. "Oh, no, indeed, Louis dear! Why I care more for you than any one almost. Can not you see that I do?"

"Can not *you* see, Jean?" he ejaculated, impatiently kicking a footstool along the carpet.

She looked down at the stool, and then up into his face again, so manifestly puzzled that, in spite of himself, he burst into a laugh, and gave up the attempt for that day. "She seems to have no more sense than a baby, about some things," he afterward grumbled to his mother. "She will never be like other girls, and mooning over books as she does won't improve her."

"I hope there is no attachment springing up between Edward Lawrence and her," once more said Mrs. Poynder.

"Don't talk rubbish, mother. She hasn't an idea what love is, and she isn't the sort of girl ever to be capable of much in that way. As to Lawrence, if he is fool enough to enter the race against me, he will soon find himself nowhere."

Mrs. Poynder tried to feel re-assured, telling herself that of course Edward Lawrence could have no chance against her boy. Jean must be blind, indeed, not to perceive dear Louis's superiority. Still, she wished Louis would bring matters to a crisis. The sooner the engagement was made known, the better now. The Orme's garden-party

would afford a very good opportunity for making it known, if dear Louis would only settle it at once. Many besides Mrs. Poynder were counting upon the opportunities at the Orme's garden-party. Edward Lawrence had made up his mind to try his fortune with Jean, with whom, to the best of his capacity, he was deeply in love; and Maud Poynder determined that Nugent Orme should be brought to the point some way, to say nothing of the many others eagerly anticipating the event of the year to bring about a crisis in their lives.

Jean had only accompanied her cousin Maud to the Grange upon two or three occasions, and then she had found herself rather *de trop*, Miss Orme making no effort to appear more cordial than she felt toward her. She had sat stiff and prim in the little lady's morning-room during the visit, feeling almost as though she were back at Ivy Lodge again. Indeed, Miss Orme always assumed a school-mistress tone in speaking to Jean the few sentences addressed to her, being carefully adapted to a child's intelligence, and inculcating a very pronounced moral. The girl offended her sense of propriety, and propriety was part of Miss Orme's religion. She had not taken the trouble to show the glories of the Grange to Jean. The latter had only seen its north aspect, and wondered to hear people talk so much of its beauties. There was the fine lawn, to be sure; but Jean thought that the view of the heath from Fernside was quite as good, and less bounded.

No one seemed able to talk of any thing but the coming fête, and the earnest way in which the millinery question was discussed showed Jean how very important the occasion was considered to be. Annie Lawrence confided to her that she had ordered the most startling of costumes and "the most daring little hat you can conceive, my dear." She shrugged her pretty shoulders when, in answer to her inquiries, Jean confessed that Aunt Maria always chose what she was to wear, and she had not asked what her dress was to be. But she was too kind-hearted to make any other comment. "I suppose the dear child" [Annie Lawrence had arrived at the mature age of eighteen] "is too dependent upon them to have any will of her own," she thought. "But her turn will come soon; Edward won't grudge her any thing, and I can put her up to things a little when she gets less shy with me." For at times there was still a difference—reserve, or what Annie Lawrence termed shyness—between them. Ellen Brayleigh gave it the name of romance; but the other warmly defended her favorite from such an imputation. "Oh no, Ellen; that's too bad! Jean isn't a bit silly. That dreamy way she has sometimes is only manner, because she had no companions of her own age at school. She's

the jolliest darling, and has got lots of fun in her when you draw her out."

But Ellen Brayleigh had once or twice seen something in Jean to which she could give no name, if romance was not the right word for it.

Jean did not know, nor perhaps did Mrs. Poynder herself, that her dresses were always chosen to contrast with, and, so to speak, serve as a background to, her cousin Maud's. But it generally happened that the colors contrasting with Maud's became her; or if they were a little too sombre in tone, a latent artistic taste of her own caused her to add a bow or flower, which imparted the required tint. When she entered the drawing-room attired for the fête, her dress was entirely white, even to the feather in her hat; and though a pretty enough contrast to Maud's mauves, it was a little trying to the wearer.

"You require a little color about you, Jean," said Louis, critically. He was quite willing she should be admired, although not appropriated, by other men.

"Do I? Oh yes; why, of course I do!" she ejaculated, looking in the glass. "But I can easily manage it by putting a rose-colored bow or two on my dress; and if I may have some roses—may I, auntie?"

"Certainly, dear, as many as you please, and the rose-colored bows really would be an improvement."

"Would not you prefer a colored feather in your hat, Jean? I have a green one I could lend you," asked Maud.

"Oh no, thank you. The ribbons and roses will do," replied unconscious Jean. "Light and dark ones mixed, you know, Louis—lots of them, and nothing else."

He made havoc among the roses, and in five minutes Jean was transformed. Knots of rose-colored ribbons about her dress, and roses in her hand and at her breast, gave just the finishing touch to her toilet, which would have satisfied an artist, though it somewhat destroyed the effect of her cousin's mauves. Little did Jean suspect the surprise that awaited her. When she entered the Grange drawing-room, and her eyes fell upon the lovely view from its windows, she stood as if spell-bound, quite deaf to the few words of welcome uttered by Miss Orme, and thereby confirming the little lady's previous impressions respecting her.

"May I go out?" she presently whispered to her cousin. "Oh, Maud, may I, please?" with brilliant eyes and deepening color.

"Yes, of course you may, child," absently replied Maud, as Nugent Orme entered the room at the moment, and advanced toward her. "Louis or mamma will accompany you if you ask one of them."

Taking instant advantage of the permission, and without giving a thought to the propriety of being accompanied, Jean has-

tily stole out of the nearest window, and stood for a few moments as if spell-bound.

The marquees for refreshment were placed to the left of the house, and there was nothing to vulgarize or interfere with the prospect, the animated faces and pretty dresses of the lady guests and uniforms of the bandmen adding only life and color to the scene. The broad greensward, bathed in sunshine, the soft-swelling uplands in the distance, the grateful shade of the fine old trees on either side, the right deepening into cool shadowy woods, and the left gently undulating toward a lake, glittering like diamonds here and there through the foliage, imparted an idea of color, space, and harmony not often to be seen at fêtes.

Jean glanced at the company. Some were standing about in groups, renewing and making acquaintance, amidst soft laughter and pretty patter of words, while others were already straying with the one under the trees. "No one will miss me," she thought delightedly. And, descending the broad steps of the terrace, she turned to the right and went toward the woods.

"Where is Jean?" two or three hours later inquired Mrs. Poynder, first of one and then of the other.

No one could tell her. She was all the more anxious to ascertain in consequence of a rumor that had reached her. She had been asked if it was true that an engagement was on the tapis between her niece and Edward Lawrence. The latter's sister made so very sure that when her brother's mind was quite made up Jean would be found willing, that she had given one or two of her friends a hint what to expect. Mrs. Poynder had been more than once congratulated upon her niece's engagement. Edward Lawrence was the son of a rich man, and considered a prize in the matrimonial lottery. The anxious mother tried to impress the necessity for immediate action upon her son. It was so very thoughtless of Louis to lose sight of Jean that day. But he was enjoying his freedom, and had no idea of losing his prestige by assuming the position of an engaged man before it was absolutely necessary to so do. He quieted his mother by promising to look after Jean, and in ten minutes had forgotten her in a flirtation with Annie Lawrence.

There was one looking for Jean in earnest, and he at length found her. Her hat thrown off, her hair thrust back from her brow, and her hands clasped behind her head, she was half sitting, half lying in one of Nature's seats, dainty enough for Titania herself, in a little mossy dell half hidden in the leafy solitude of the woods.

"Miss Raymond?" delightedly.

"Mr. Lawrence?" in how different a tone, as she gathered up her hat and gloves.

"Do not rise! Pray let me join you!" he said, eagerly.

"Oh no. You have spoiled it all now," a little impatiently—"just as I could almost hear their tinkling feet."

He looked round.

"The fairies, you know. How can you help believing in them a tiny little here?"

"I only know it is fairy-land to me," he stammered out, reddening and paling with hope and fear, as he hurried on, too much in earnest to pick and choose his words; "but any place would seem that to me where you are."

She glanced at him with troubled eyes, and turned slowly away.

"Do not go: pray let me speak to you! Pray forgive my abruptness, but—oh, Jean! do you not know—have you not seen that I love you?" fastening his eyes upon her down-cast face.

"I know—I have thought latterly that you were not quite the same as other people are to me; but I am very sorry if that is the reason," she murmured.

"Oh, do not say so! do not say that!" he pleaded, growing very white.

"But I must say it if it is true. I am sorry—very, very sorry." Looking at him with puzzled eyes (she was quite as much puzzled as sorry), she added, "However came you to?"

"How could I help it, knowing you? Oh, Jean, give me some hope!"

"I—forgive me if I do not say it in the right way, please do. I am sure I don't want to seem unkind, but I don't care about being loved in that way. I like reading about it in books, but it does not seem nice in reality, and—I am afraid I have a hard heart. Oh, dear! pray do not look like that! What-ever can I say to comfort you? I'm not half so nice as other girls when you come to know me. Louis is always complaining about my being so different, and I never had a prize at school, and no girl could have more natural defects. Miss Bowles always said so."

"Then she was an idiot, whoever she was. But, be your defects what they may, I love you as I shall never love another as long as I live," he simply replied, trying to bear the blow in manly fashion, but quivering painfully under it. Then came a momentary gleam of hope. There did not appear to be any one else in her thoughts; perhaps, in time, there might be a chance for him. "Will you let me try to win your love, Miss Raymond? Oh, Jean, let me try! I know I am not worthy of you; no man could ever be that; but I will wait so patiently, and strive so hard!"

He was answered by her sorrowful gesture, and the tears stealing down her cheeks, and he went on in a low voice, "Do not be unhappy; do not let me feel I have marred your enjoyment. May I take you toward the band, Miss Raymond? I can show you the shortest way through the plantations."

For, if his love was not of the very highest order, he was sincere and unselfish enough to wish to see her happy.

"I don't care about it now," she said, simply. "How could I, when I know I have given you pain? I would rather stay here a little, and I think—yes, there are my cousins and Mr. Orme, so you need not mind."

"Good-bye, Jean. God bless you, Miss Raymond!" he whispered, darting away as the others advanced.

"Jean!" ejaculated Maud, as she recognized the bowed figure and noted the young girl's dejected air. "And who was that hurrying away?" she wondered. She was angry as well as surprised. Just as they came within sight of Jean, Nugent Orme had once more approached the subject which was of such vital importance to her. The words her soul hungered for seemed upon his lips when this girl once more prevented their being spoken.

"Was that Louis who just left you?" she went on to ask the confused, blushing girl.

"No."

"Would it not be wiser to keep with those you know, my dear Jean?"

"Oh yes, ever so much wiser," ruefully returned Jean; "but it is too late now."

"Too late to be wiser, Miss Raymond?"

She turned away, and, with an angry jerk, threw one of her roses against the trunk of a tree, its leaves lightly drifting in all directions.

"Now, if I stood where that tree is, and your flower were a stone," he said, with an amused smile, but looking a little curiously at her flushed face.

"Has any one offended you, Jean?" softly asked Maud.

"Myself," a little curtly.

"Offended with yourself?" laughed Maud.

"Then I fear I can not be of any assistance."

"No."

Nugent Orme gazed speculatively at the girlish face, which expressed so much more than Jean was conscious that it did.

"Are you coming with us, Jean?"

"Yes, if you please—if you don't mind," said blundering Jean, becoming aware of something less genial than usual in the other's tone.

"Mind? No, of course not; why should I?" returned poor Maud, obliged to keep a smile on her face though ready to cry with vexation. "Perhaps you would like to go toward the open, where the band is?"

"Where you please, Maud; I don't care," dolefully from Jean.

"An awful retribution is said to have once come upon a young gentleman who 'did not care,' Miss Raymond. He was torn to pieces by wild bears on the coast of Barbary."

"I don't see why you should always talk

to me as though I were a child, Mr. Orme. I call it very rude, as well as unkind."

"Jean?"

"Well, Maud, would not you think so if Mr. Orme were the same to you?"

"Let me apologize without waiting for the verdict," he said, gravely. "I am really sorry to appear rude or unkind to you, Miss Raymond. I had not the least intention of being either."

"I dare say it is a great deal my fault, Mr. Orme; but I am not quite so stupid as you think me. I am sure I could understand better if you tried to make me."

He bowed silently, and presently, to her great relief, seemed to become too much absorbed in conversation with Maud to remember her existence. "Ah, it's no wonder he finds me stupid in comparison with Maud, though it is not kind to let me see it so plainly," thought Jean, as she listened to her cousin's well-chosen sentences, uttered in a low, sweet, even tone. But, as Maud intended they should (it was no use keeping in the words if Jean was with them), they were soon in the midst of the company, Maud showing her fitness to be the future mistress of the Grange by many a kindly, graceful speech when Nugent Orme tried to do his part as host. Jean sat down near the band, and presently Louis came to her side, prepared to make up a little for previous neglect.

"There is some talk of dancing for an hour or so when the sun is down, Jean," he whispered; "and you must remember I don't mean to let you waltz with any one but me."

"I don't want to dance, thank you, Louis."

"Don't want?" he glanced at her grave face, and, fancying that she was piqued, and was at last beginning to be a little like other girls, and trying to coquette with him. "Not with me, Jean, after my keeping myself free for you? What have I done to deserve such punishment as that?"

"Nothing—only—please don't ask me, Louis."

"But you promised, you know, if there should be any dancing. Nonsense, Jean; of course you will; come along."

"No; I could not—not now. It would be like dancing over a grave."

"What is the matter—has any thing happened?" he asked, his keen black eyes trying to fathom her soft brown ones. Although her eyelids drooped beneath his gaze, and she averted her blushing, conscious face, her lips were firmly closed. Frank and true as she was, he had known her long enough to be aware that she had a will stronger than his own, when she chose to exercise it, and he saw that she now did not choose to explain the cause of her sudden disinclination for dancing.

"Come and have something to eat. You look fagged, and not half yourself to-day.

The most romantic young ladies—you know you are given to romance—can not live entirely upon air, and life will have quite another aspect for you after a little chicken and Champagne."

She rose to accompany him; any thing was better than being catechised. On their way to the tent, they met Annie Lawrence, with two or three adorners in her wake.

"Where have you hidden yourself all day, child?" she ejaculated in gay spirits, having succeeded in shocking the "slow Unwins" to her heart's content. "Have you seen Edward lately, any one—have you, Jean? Mr. Tarleton says he saw him going away; but that could not be. Wasn't he with you just now, dear?"

Jean's downcast eyes, fluttering color, and nervous little whispered "Yes," gave the sister half a hint, and told Louis, who had previously been so puzzled to account for her grave reticence, all.

"She has refused him!" was his swift, triumphant thought; "and I'm all right now!"

"She *can not* have refused my Edward!" thought the indignant little sister. "She can not have been so stupid as that. Refuse Edward—a chit like her—when any other girl would thank her stars for such a chance! If she can't love him, dear good fellow as he is, she is not what I believed her to be." And in her love for her brother Annie Lawrence was, for the time being, quite unjust to her friend. She turned away with a toss of the head, a look meant to be very cutting, and a severe little speech about "Edward being dearer to her than any one else in the world."

But Jean was not at all inclined to resent her anger. She was too really troubled at having given rise to it.

Louis had quite recovered his spirits. There was no necessity to hurry matters now. He could enjoy his freedom a little longer, and come to the fore again when it suited him so to do. So he made himself a very amusing companion, and, in spite of herself, soon made Jean feel that she had not entirely lost her capacity for enjoyment, although she was still firm in her decision not to dance. But he was quite agreeable to that now, leaving her to do as she chose, without any further protest.

She sat quiet and abstracted, longing for the day to be over. She was afraid now to separate from the rest of the company, and could not enjoy either the music or the scenery in her own fashion, without the accompaniment of the light laughter and babble of talk around her. So she sat with, though not of, them, gazing wistfully toward the shadow-land beneath the trees. The loveliness of the scene had a more bewitching charm to her, now that the red gold of sunset was succeeded by soft silver moonlight.

How was it she was so different from other girls? How was it she could not love Edward Lawrence? He was so good, and kind, and nice-looking. She had liked him so much before he began to talk love to her, and then her heart had seemed to harden. "No, I am not like other girls. I do not think I shall ever feel that sort of love—unless—but he is only in a book, and of course he would not like me if he were real!"

"My dear Jean, what has become of you all day? I really have not caught sight of you once!" said Mrs. Poynder, tapping her on the shoulder. "I hope Louis has seen after you in the way of refreshments and so forth?"

"Oh yes, thank you, auntie; he wanted me to have lots of things. Louis is always so kind."

"But how is it you have not joined the dancers, my dear? Did not Louis—"

"Yes; he wanted me to, but I did not care about it."

The anxious mother glanced down at the pale, thoughtful face. Was it the time for congratulation? She did not feel quite sure enough to venture; but went on gently, half interrogatively,

"Louis feels a great deal more than kind to you, Jean dear."

"And so I do to him, auntie. No one is so nice as Louis."

"No one?" with a playful little tap on the young girl's cheek.

"I meant no gentleman—except papa, you know. Dear father! was he like you, Aunt Maria, fair and tall?"

"No, dear, dark and short."

"Dark?" with a disappointed look. "I always pictured him tall and fair, with gray eyes—grand-looking."

The mother jealously remembered that by a slight stretch of imagination that description might apply to Edward Lawrence, and a little pettishly replied, "You would be very unlike your father if he were that."

"Yes, all but being tall." Then, after a moment or two, she went on: "Did you know mamma, Aunt Maria?"

"No, nor do I know any one who did," shortly returned Mrs. Poynder. "I think people are moving away very fast, and I am sure Miss Orme must be quite thankful for it, after so very fatiguing a day. Where is Louis, I wonder? Do you see Maud anywhere, Jean?"

"I saw Mr. Orme and her go in that direction, under the trees, not long ago, Aunt Maria."

Mrs. Poynder hesitated a moment. Surely it must all be settled between them by this time, and she was beginning to feel so tired. "Will you try to find them for me, my dear? Tell Maud that the carriage was ordered for nine; and the more of us who set the example of leaving, the better now

for poor Miss Orme's sake. She was looking quite worn out just now."

Jean started on her errand. Mrs. Poynder looked about for her son, and presently came upon him just emerging from one of the tents with his partner in a waltz just finished. He brought her a chair, and stood leaning over it, whispering pretty nonsense, while he gently fanned her with all the *empressment* of a lover. Really, how trying Louis was, knowing as he did how much depended upon his making way with his cousin just now. "Louis!" she presently ejaculated, rather sharply, "I want you to see about the carriage; it must be waiting, I think, and you will find us here on your return."

"All right, mother."

But she had to wait patiently as she might, while he whispered a last few words to the laughing girl.

"Ready to go, did you say?" he asked, when at length he turned toward his mother. "Where are the others? It's no use my seeing after the carriage until they are here."

"Jean has gone to fetch your sister;" adding anxiously, "How can you be so foolish as to flirt in that way, Louis? If Jean had been here, what would she—"

"Oh, Jean is all right, mother."

"Are you engaged? Is it settled, then?" she eagerly asked.

"Not exactly, but the way is clear. She has refused Lawrence."

Mrs. Poynder breathed a sigh of relief. "But don't you think it is safest to make quite sure, my dear boy? Some one else may come forward, you know."

"No fear of that—men are not so ready as all that; and if they were, I flatter myself they would have no chance against me with Jean."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BETWEEN THE CUP AND THE LIP.

"DEAR Maud, I can not let you go tonight without asking you—"

"Maud, Aunt Maria sent me to tell you that the carriage must be waiting, and she feels tired, and wants to go," said Jean, suddenly emerging from a group of trees into a strip of moonlight, where the two were standing.

Maud Poynder's nerves had been stretched to their utmost tension all day. In her deep anxiety, she had not been able to take any food; and now Nugent Orme had drawn her apart for the third time, intending to speak the words she was longing to hear. She saw the white figure emerge like her evil genius from the shadow, felt that the cup was once more dashed from her lips, and,

swerving aside with an exclamation of dismay, she slipped upon the dewy turf, and fell before Nugent Orme could save her.

"Are you hurt, Maud?"

"Dear Maud, speak to us!" they ejaculated, bending over her with anxious looks and ready hands.

She lay without sense or motion amidst a confused heap of lace and muslin, her white face upturned in the moonlight.

"Dear Maud, are you— She has fainted, I think, Mr. Orme. Will you stay with her while I run and fetch something?"

"Yes; go quick."

Jean sped away, and Nugent Orme bent tenderly over the inanimate form, with words which poor Maud would have bartered her soul to hear. He was terribly in earnest. Unused to witness suffering of any kind, and still less to suffer, it seemed to act as a sort of touchstone to his innermost nature, bringing to the surface a tenderness which he had not hitherto given others, much less himself, credit for possessing. Womanish weakness he would have designated it an hour before, a weakness to be ashamed of; yet there it was. In the depths of his nature lay a tenderness which was almost more than womanish, in contrast with its heights. A low moan was his only answer as, with murmured words of love, he strove to raise her. Afraid to venture more, he knelt by her side, placed his palms under her head—he could not bear to see it pillowed upon the turf—and impatiently waited for help. It was quickly at hand.

Jean sped back toward the tents, hastily arranging in her mind what was best to be done as she ran. Auntie must not be alarmed. No, no necessity to tell any one but just those she required. Louis—a doctor, if one happened to be present—and one woman, if she could meet the right one to be useful. Her cousin Louis and a doctor were readily found, the latter and his wife being present as guests, and, for lack of better, Jean herself represented womankind.

"Be quick, please; how slow you are!" she ejaculated, flying in advance of the two men toward the spot where she had left her cousin, carrying a carafe of water and smelling-salts, the latter taken with half an apology from the unwilling hands of she knew not whom, and the other from one of the refreshment-tables.

They found Maud still insensible, lying just as she had fallen. Dr. Travers touched her pulse, then stood back a moment studying her position. "Be good enough—no, here, Mr. Orme, at the shoulders—now, Mr. Poynder—together; raise her gently. Only a little, so that I may get her foot from under. That's well, young lady," as Jean lightly bathed her cousin's temples. Nugent and Louis carefully raised the prostrate girl, while Dr. Travers gently extrica-

ted the foot doubled under her, Jean silently giving her help.

"Oh! let me lie—my foot—my foot!" groaned Maud.

"I see. Now, flat upon the turf for a few moments. Ankle dislocated, I fear," he murmured. "Will you run forward and prepare them to receive us at the house?" he said, with a kindly nod, to Jean. "Leave it to her," he added to the anxious men; "she knows how to go to work." For his professional eyes had quickly recognized the qualities he wanted in Jean. Silence, quickness, deftness, and self-control had all developed themselves to his quick apprehension, as he noted how she had singled out just the help she wanted, made no confidants, and possessed herself of the water and smelling-salts.

Jean hurried forward on her errand, only stopping a moment on her way to whisper a word to the butler in the refreshment tent. Miss Orme was in the drawing-room, receiving with a very gracious, if rather a worn-out, smile the hundred and fiftieth assurance that this had been the very best of all the Grange fêtes, and altogether the most delightful day in the speaker's life, really! when Jean slipped behind, and tapped the little lady on the shoulder.

"Miss Orme, my cousin Maud is not very well, and wants to lie down. May I ask one of the maids to show me a room without taking you from your guests?"

"Maud? Overfatigued, I suppose. Of course; she will feel at home here. Ask for my own maid, Ford, Miss Raymond."

Armed with this authority—her only motive for applying to Miss Orme had been to get it—Jean went off in search of Ford. When the little party approached the house with their burden, they were met by the butler, and led round to the side entrance, as Jean had suggested, so as to avoid attracting the attention of the remaining guests. Jean and Ford were waiting to receive them, and led them immediately to a spare room, where two maids were busily putting the finishing touches to the arrangements for the sufferer. Maud was tenderly placed upon the bed, and then, excluding all but Jean and Ford, Dr. Travers proceeded to examine the injury. "Dislocation of the ankle, accompanied with general exhaustion," was his verdict, after a few minutes' manipulation of the foot. "I will remain here while you inform our hostess, and see that what I want is brought at once," he said, turning toward Jean in the matter-of-course way he would have spoken to a well-trained nurse, sure of being understood and obeyed, and giving her a short list of his requirements. Jean found her way to the servants' offices, herself carried up what was required, and then set off to find her aunt and Miss Orme.

They were both in the first excitement of

having heard that an accident had happened to Maud somewhere in the grounds, and in a few quiet words she told them the truth, but so told it that it was less alarming than the vague rumors which had reached them.

"Every thing is being done, Aunt Maria. Miss Orme was kind enough to give me permission, and dear Maud is being well cared for. Dr. Travers bade me tell you that there is no cause for alarm, and the pain will soon be allayed. He will send word when you can go to her."

"How did it happen?" asked Mrs. Poynder.

"Quite accidentally, aunt. She slipped as she turned to answer me when I gave you my message, and fell with her foot doubled under her."

In a hurried, nervous way Miss Orme summoned the housekeeper, and issued numerous directions and injunctions respecting the arrangements for her dear Maud's comfort; all of which, armed with her brief authority, Jean had already put *en train*. She begged her dear old friend to remain at the Grange, and use the servants and every thing it contained as her own. Then, after a moment's hesitation (she could not very well send her home alone with Louis), she extended the invitation to Jean.

In time the last guest had got through the last compliment, and only a solitary light in the Grange windows told of the watching within. Dr. Travers had selected Jean and Ford only out of the many who proffered their services to sit up with his patient, excluding even the anxious mother herself.

"No, no; you want rest yourself, my dear madam, and can not be of the least service here. I've got what I want," he added, with a glance at Jean's quiet face and a nod toward Ford. "Young and able to expend a little more in the way of strength than yourself. Try to get a good night's rest, Mrs. Poynder, with the full assurance that there is not the slightest cause for anxiety."

He afterward repeated almost the same words to Nugent Orme, who anxiously awaited him in the library. "The young lady and the maid will be quite enough, my dear sir. The former is quite a host in herself."

"Miss Raymond!" ejaculated Nugent, in unfeigned surprise. "I should have supposed her too—" He did not like to give expression to the word in his thoughts, and a little awkwardly substituted "delicate."

"Delicate! not she, any more than a racer is delicate in contrast with a dray-horse."

"But—"

"My dear sir, she has just the kind of strength a medical man is very glad to find and make use of in any emergency like this. I wish it were not quite so rare. Why, that girl had her feelings under control in a moment, and used her wits to manage things

quietly for me, as well as one of the best-trained nurses could have done; no stir in the house, and quietly led in by a side-way up to a room already prepared, where there were only three women in the secret, when I feared to find it crowded with foolish people. Then the way she managed the mother and Miss Orme! Pardon me, but elderly ladies are apt to be a little nervous and difficult to deal with on such occasions, you know. The injury? Well, a little tedious probably, but," he added, remembering the rumor of an engagement being on the tapis between his patient and Nugent Orme, "nothing permanent, no lameness. Oh dear, no, not the slightest danger of that."

When Jean entered the breakfast-room, to which she was shown the next morning, she found only Nugent Orme there, the two elder ladies being glad to take a longer rest than usual after the fatigue and excitement of the previous day. After his inquiries had been satisfied respecting Maud, Nugent spoke a few words to Jean more kindly than he had ever yet spoken to her.

"Dr. Travers tells me that we owe a great deal to your promptness and foresight last night, Miss Raymond."

She looked askance at him, rather doubtful of this sudden politeness—in truth, expecting some little tag in the way of banter to the compliments—and gave him only a bow for reply.

"I am afraid I must trouble you to preside this morning, Miss Raymond," he went on, with a half smile at what he took to be a school-girl's shyness. She did not appear very self-possessed just now.

"Oh dear!" thought Jean, wishing herself a hundred miles away; but she took the seat he indicated, and nervously commenced her task. "Do you take tea or coffee, Mr. Orme?"

"Coffee, please. I am really sorry to give you the trouble," he said, trying to repress a smile at the idea of this young lady having her feelings under control.

"Oh, it isn't the trouble," said poor blundering Jean, unmistakably showing *what* it was.

"What may I give you—omelet? Or do you like a grill—some of this chicken? I am afraid you have overtaxed your strength," he added, kindly, as she declined every thing but a little cold toast.

"No, I do not feel in the least tired."

"Your appetite is never very good, perhaps?"

"Oh, yes it is. I am a very hungry girl generally," thawing a little to his genial manner—more genial than she had ever yet known it to be; for, whatever his prejudices might be, Nugent Orme was gentleman enough to try to entertain her, now she was his guest. "Miss Bowles was always complaining about my appetite."

"Complaining?"

"About its being so vulgar, you know."

"Miss Bowles was your school-mistress, I presume?" glad to have hit upon some subject about which she would speak. "You must have found it terribly dull work at school. I think I once heard that you had never had a holiday?"

"Not out of school, as long as I can recollect."

"Then I suppose you found your vacations the dulllest times, your companions being away?"

"I never had any companions. Miss Bowles thought it wouldn't be right for me to make friends with the other girls because they were the daughters of gentlemen, and she thought I should have to work for money. She did not know about papa then, or it would have been very different; she told me so."

"No doubt. A very sharp lady, your Miss Bowles. I can't conceive how you managed to avoid doing something wicked."

"I didn't avoid it," she gravely returned.

"Now you have excited my curiosity. Don't you think you are bound to explain what your idea of being wicked is?"

"No; you would not understand."

Her brown eyes turned meditatively upon him for a few moments, as she thought how little allowance he would make for the "Letters from Fairy-land." His own fell, the color in his face deepened, and for the moment he was at a loss for words—a phenomenon quite new to Nugent Orme. When he presently tried to renew the conversation, she had shyly shrunk back into her shell again. But he had succeeded in making her feel the least little bit more at home with him by the time she rose from the table, though he saw she was glad to do so as quickly as possible.

"Now, if there were really the strength and judgment Travers talks about allied to the simplicity—the simplicity is genuine enough, I begin to fancy—the girl would be an interesting study. But it's just the mental power which I can not believe in; it is merely the innocence of ignorance, I expect, and any uncultivated country girl may have that." Then his thoughts reverted to Maud, and Jean was forgotten.

He went to the library, rather restlessly awaiting the doctor's report. "All was going on well," said that gentleman. It was a case requiring little besides patience. Miss Poynder could not be moved for a few weeks, perhaps, but meanwhile he had no restrictions to make beyond the necessity for keeping the foot in one position. Nourishing diet, society, books, what not—her friends might pet her to their hearts' content. They gladly availed themselves of the permission, Miss Orme having a special gift for petting those she loved. Maud found her-

self surrounded with all sorts of proofs of the love of her friends. Unlike many a poor invalid, barely able to realize kindness, and still less to avail themselves of good things, Maud could enjoy as well as appreciate: the freshest of fruit; all sorts of dainties invented by Miss Orme and the housekeeper; all the new books and reviews, with willing readers when she herself was disinclined for the exertion of turning the leaves; precious little notes from Nugent Orme upon the questions they were mutually interested in—Maud was experiencing all a convalescent's advantages, without having gone through the usual probation of pain and suffering. It was so pleasant to lie on the roomy couch, wheeled toward the open window, and gaze upon the lovely scene beyond, half dreamily listening to the rooks, and picturing the time when this would be her home. How foolishly nervous she had been because Nugent happened to be interrupted at the moment of telling his love! She felt quite ashamed of her weakness, and was glad now to attribute it to physical exhaustion. She had eaten nothing all day, and was, naturally enough, faint for want of food. Of course it was now the same as though the words had been spoken, and when she was able to make her appearance down-stairs she would not again allow any false delicacy to stand in her way. She would herself lead up to the point if he did not, only of course he would. Ah, how hard she would try to deserve the blessing of his love! how hard she would strive to be a good woman! So the time went pleasantly on with Maud. She was not naturally inclined to be irritable, and it was so easy to be patient, now that the future seemed sure.

After a few days Mrs. Poynder returned to Fernside (there was more necessity for her presence there than at the Grange), leaving Jean to be useful to her cousin, and contenting herself by a daily visit there either from herself or son.

Although Miss Orme was as far as ever from taking very much to Jean, she could not but acknowledge to herself that the presence of a young girl brought a great deal of sunshine to the old house. In spite of herself, the little lady was often amused at the very things she reprehended. Jean's unconscious violations of the conventionalities, her droll surprise when her mistakes were explained to her, her quaint school-girl stiffness one ten minutes and apparent disregard of all propriety the next, quite took the little lady's breath away. Then her awkward habit of always asking the reasons for things. No gentlewoman could possibly do this or that; reasons all-sufficient for Miss Orme failed to impress this tiresome girl. *Why* couldn't a gentlewoman do this? and *why* could not a gentlewoman do that? would gravely ask Jean.



But, her many defects notwithstanding, it was pleasant to hear the sweet girlish laugh about the house, and watch her flitting about the flower-beds or wandering under the trees, in her simple holland dress and broad-leaved hat. Then Miss Orme liked to listen to her playing in the evening; not the playing dubbed brilliant just coming into vogue, but dreamy communings with a world not in the little lady's geography, chiefly approved of for its somniferous effect and capability of being executed in the twilight, which she loved.

Maud was rather desirous than otherwise that her cousin and Nugent should be thrown together. Had he not told her that she never appeared to so much advantage as when in contrast with the romantic school-girl? and had not Jean been always his laughing-stock? So she freely sent the young girl to him with books and messages (she did not know that Jean always availed herself of the mediumship of a servant to do the errands), keeping up a constant communication with him. He was quite as ready as she, sending her little notes about the books they were reading, daily offering of flowers, etc., intrusting them to Jean, who was willing enough to take the replies, though she was shy of carrying the messages to the library, where he seemed almost to live except at meal-times.

Louis Poynder was availing himself of what he termed his freedom according to his taste, contenting himself with looking in at the Grange once or twice a week, and chatting pleasantly with Jean when she happened to be in the way. It was not always; when not with Maud, she spent most of her time in the open air, to the detriment of her complexion, although if she caught sight of her cousin Louis, she would run—race Miss Orme termed it—in to talk to him. Indeed, her bearing toward Louis quite scandalized Miss Orme.

"You must allow me to tell you that it is not at all good taste, to use that term in speaking to a gentleman, Miss Raymond!" she said, somewhat stiffly, one day at luncheon, when Jean had made some allusion to "dear Louis."

"Not if he is my cousin, and I love him, Miss Orme?" said Jean, looking surprised.

"I presume your love is only of the ordinary and proper kind usual between cousins, Miss Raymond?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I have never known any cousins but my own, so I can't tell what they do; but I've always called him 'dear Louis,' and he seems to like it, Miss Orme."

"Gentlemen may say they like it, perhaps; but they can not have much respect for a young lady who addresses them in that way. I should be very sorry to hear Nugent called 'dear.'"

"Oh yes, of course; that would be *quite* different!" hastily ejaculated Jean, blushing violently. "I'm sure Mr. Orme knows I should never want to!" Turning toward him with tears of vexation in her eyes, she added, earnestly, "You know I should not, don't you? No, not even if you were my cousin!"

"I am quite aware there are cousins and cousins, Miss Raymond; and I am not so conceited as to suppose I should make so good a cousin as Louis Poynder."

Miss Orme nodded her wise little head. She had made a discovery, and immediately luncheon was over carried the news to Maud.

## CHAPTER IX.

### NUGENT ORME'S DISCOVERY.

"I DO not wish to make you anxious, my dear Maud; I am sure you know that," began Miss Orme, sitting down with great solemnity by the former's side. "Nevertheless, it is clearly my duty to inform you at once, so that that you may give your brother a hint to be on his guard."

"What is he to be on his guard against, dear Miss Orme?" languidly inquired Maud, too much accustomed to the little lady's solemn, important air about trifles to expect any thing very astonishing.

"Are you feeling strong this morning, my dear?" cautiously asked Miss Orme.

"Oh yes; indeed, quite strong enough to hear any thing you have to tell, dear. Do not be afraid."

"Then, I am sorry to tell you that I have discovered symptoms of an attachment, certainly more than cousinly, in Miss Raymond toward your brother, my dear. I saw at once that not a moment must be lost."

Maud repressed the smile that rose to her lips, and gravely replied,

"You are so keen-sighted, so very observant, dear; I am quite afraid of you sometimes, really!"

"My dear child, that you never need be; you need not fear your most inmost thoughts being read."

Maud reflected a few moments. If the idea was just growing upon Jean, it would never do to let this little busybody frighten her out of it. So she said, softly and confidentially, "Do you know, quite, quite between ourselves—"

"Yes, yes, of course!" eagerly.

"I sometimes think that it would not be so very bad a thing to happen. You see, dear Louis is so very high-principled. I do not think he could be induced to take even a part of my uncle's money now the daughter is acknowledged, though he has always been led to believe it would be all his. And, although he is shy of allowing Jean to see it,

lest it might be supposed he were thinking of the money, mamma and I have sometimes fancied of late that he is growing attached to her. If, as you think, Jean returns his love, matters might be very comfortably arranged, might they not?"

Miss Orme was silent, trying to get used to the idea, her prejudice against Jean being rather in the way of her doing so.

"Jean requires a little polish, certainly," went on Maud; "but I have already observed a slight difference in her since she has been here, and I know it is owing to your influence. You might do an immense deal for poor Jean. So judicious too. You will not, I know, let her suspect for a moment that we desired either to force or prevent the engagement."

"No, my dear, certainly not," returned the lady, with a very judicious air indeed.

"Fancy your being the first to discover Jean's love for Louis, dear Miss Orme, after mamma and I having failed! We were so anxious on his account, you know. How few are gifted with such keen perception!"

"Flatterer!" ejaculated the delighted little lady. "Might I not say how few are ready to acknowledge any superiority in others? But rest assured of my using my 'gift' in the right way. Leave every thing to me, my dear, and we shall have it all settled in due time."

Maud tried to look satisfied, repeating, "I know you will not let her perceive what you have discovered?"

"Oh dear, no; of course not. I will be particularly careful, and for dear Louis's sake I will do every thing in my power to improve her."

So Miss Orme grew more gracious toward Jean, and endeavored to believe that the process of improvement had begun, although her sense of propriety was sorely tried, and her power of discrimination more frequently at fault than she would have liked to acknowledge. In truth, Jean's nature was just as perplexing as ever to Miss Orme, who believed that character could be, and ought to be, made to pattern. There was so much apparent contradiction in her to the little lady's eyes. Where other girls would be shy and retiring, Jean often appeared free to the very verge of boldness; and where they would be free, shy even to awkwardness. Boldness, shyness, conceit, want of proper self-respect, obtuseness, quickness, frankness, reticence—her puzzled little hostess found herself alternately giving the girl credit for possessing all sorts of contradictory qualities.

But some one besides Miss Orme was beginning to feel a little puzzled about Jean.

"Mr. Orme," she said, shyly and hesitatingly, to him one morning when he happened to enter the breakfast-room in search of a book, and to his surprise found her poring

over the *Times* with an open dictionary by her side, "would you mind explaining about the national debt to me? I can't understand what this article says about it, and I want to so much!"

He smiled, highly amused at her attempting a *Times* leader. "Are you going through a course of political reading, Miss Raymond?"

"I want to understand how to read politics."

"And you don't find the dictionary of much assistance?"

"No; it's no use looking for words when you want ideas."

He looked at her a little curiously. "You will find it rather a dry study searching after political ideas. Wouldn't you prefer a novel?"

"Why, of course I should!" she replied, looking her surprise at his asking such a question.

"Then, why do you trouble your head with this sort of thing?" lightly touching the *Times*.

"Because I have to."

He bowed to such an unanswerable reason, and good-naturedly helped her with an idea or two, giving her a rough explanation of what puzzled her.

A few days later Miss Orme and Jean were in the drawing-room, getting through the interval between dinner and tea, the former dozing over her knitting, and the latter writing a letter, when Nugent Orme entered with a pamphlet he had promised to send to Maud. Finding himself unnoticed, and not wishing to disturb them, he seated himself on a distant couch, and noiselessly turned over the leaves of the book, marking a passage here and there for Maud's special consideration. But presently his attention was caught by a movement on the part of his aunt. The little lady was sitting very erect in her chair, an expression of severe disapproval upon her face. His eyes following the direction of hers, he saw Jean standing upon a footstool before the chimney-glass, absorbed in the contemplation of herself; turning first one side and then on the other, examining her face and figure from all points with a grave, critical air.

"Really!" ejaculated Miss Orme, quite scandalized at such an open exhibition of vanity; "you appear very much interested in what that glass tells you, Miss Raymond!"

"Yes," rather absently replied Jean, measuring her nose with her pen. Then, before the little lady had recovered from the shock, she went on: "But it is so difficult to judge about one's self. I wonder if— Would you mind telling me exactly what I look like to you, Miss Orme—my face and figure and all that, you know?"

"Really, Miss Raymond, you are the most peculiar—"

"Yes, I know; but I meant my looks. Would you mind telling me, please? Do you think I might be called nice-looking—by some?"

"There is no accounting for tastes," stiffly replied the little lady; "but if you wish to have a plain and truthful reply, I am bound to tell you I do not think so."

Jean's countenance fell. Then, examining herself again with rather anxious eyes, she added, "I can't think how it is; Annie Lawrence says my colored hair and eyes are not in fashion, but my nose is straight and the shape of my mouth is good, if you don't mind its being rather large. Oh, Miss Orme, how much I wish I were pretty—half as pretty as Maud!"

"There are other and more serious defects than want of beauty, Miss Raymond," returned the elder lady, severely.

"Of course; I know that," carelessly said Jean; "but it seems hard to have none of the right things. You don't think it would do to say I am nice-looking even—that's a long way off being beautiful, you know?" pleadingly.

"I can not say what I do not think," said Miss Orme, very decidedly.

At the moment she really believed that she did not admire the girl.

"No, of course not." And Jean stepped down from the stool, and slowly returned to her writing again.

"Cool!" thought Nugent Orme. But following her with his eyes, he saw that tears were dropping upon the paper over which she was bending.

"Nugent!" ejaculated his aunt, catching sight of him, "I did not know you were in the room. How long have you been here?" with a glance at Jean. The girl had little supposed there had been another witness to her vanity.

"About a quarter of an hour or so, Aunt Jemmy," and his eyes turned curiously in Jean's direction, as though to note the effect of his words upon her.

But she showed not the least shame or self-consciousness; merely looked up into his face in a far-off sort of way, with her pen poised in the air for a few moments, and then went on with her writing.

"I want this book conveyed to Maud, Aunt Jemmy; will you give it to her, and ask her if she thinks she can manage Goethe and Eckermann in the original, or prefers the translation?"

"Eckermann and Goethe; I will not forget, Nugent." And away trotted the little lady up to the invalid, to enlarge to her upon the hopelessness of attempting to improve a girl like Jean. Maud listened to Miss Orme's description of the scene she had just witnessed with some surprise. If Jean was vain, the quality had very suddenly developed, she thought. Nevertheless, she was

not sorry that Nugent should have been a witness to the exhibition.

As his aunt passed out of the room, Nugent Orme followed her toward the door, then hesitated, and turned back a few steps, looking speculatively at the young girl bending over her desk. Of late he had grown a little doubtful whether his first verdict against her had been altogether a just one, and began to feel some interest in solving the question.

"Are you writing an essay on beauty, Miss Raymond?"

"No; I am writing about myself to papa, Mr. Orme, and I am afraid he will be very disappointed. In his last letter he seemed so much to want me to be nice-looking."

"Would it be an impertinence to ask what you have told him?" he inquired, led on by her frankness.

"Oh no; why should it be?" She put the letter into his hand, pointing out the passage to him. "You are quite welcome to read it, if you care to."

He did care; a month—a week—before he would have at once declined the offer, with some little caustic speech about young ladies' correspondence. Now he quietly took the letter from her hand, and glanced curiously at the lines she had just been penning.

"I am so very sorry to disappoint you, dear papa. I would give any thing to be beautiful for you, but unfortunately I am plain. I hoped that I might perhaps be called nice-looking; I don't look ugly to myself in the glass; but, to be quite sure, I have just asked Miss Orme, the lady with whom we are staying, you know, and she says 'No' very decidedly, indeed. I do hope you will not mind it when you are used to me, and find out how much I can love, and how hard I will try to make you happy. Annie Lawrence once told me that her papa liked having the *Times* read to him, and to talk about politics, so I am reading an article every day to try to understand it before you come."

He placed the letter upon the table, gazing at her in dumb astonishment a few moments. What a revelation had those few words been to him! She grew uncomfortable and impatient under the grave, earnest scrutiny of his eyes, entirely misinterpreting their meaning. Taking up the letter with an angry little toss of her head, she said,

"Oh yes, I know; you are going to laugh at me; but I don't care."

"But—"

"Oh, it's all very well for the people who have had fathers to care for them from the beginning; but how would you like it if you had just found one, and you'd give all the world to tell him you were what he wanted you to be, and had to say you weren't? What am I to do if he does not love me?"

she ejaculated, turning upon him with flaming cheeks and defiant eyes. "What am I to do?"

"I do not think you have any cause for anxiety about it, Miss Raymond," he said, gently. "It did not occur to you that my aunt might say what she thought, and yet be no authority on the subject."

Her tear-dimmed eyes turned upon him a little doubtfully. It was so new to hear him speak in that tone.

"Will you allow me to say, in all sincerity, that I think you may set your father's mind at rest without departing from the truth, Miss Raymond? My aunt did not know your motive for asking her the question, and might probably have been afraid of making you vain. Besides, she is as liable to make mistakes as the rest of us, you know. But I assure you that no one could possibly be in earnest in calling you plain, and to a few you would be—" He paused, looking at the drooping face, and mentally added—"gloriously beautiful!" Yes; that had suddenly burst upon him. To a few, such as could read aright, her beauty would be a religion. As she stood before him, a half smile quivering upon her sensitive lips, and hope faintly reviving in the wondrous brown eyes, a perception of the subtle loveliness of expression grew upon him, and he could understand why other women's beauty hitherto had touched him so little.

Still a little doubtful, she presently asked, gazing straight into his eyes, "You wouldn't say it to please me, Mr. Orme? That would be no kindness, would it?"

"I assure you I have said less than I might have said, Miss Raymond."

How much less she could not imagine.

With a grateful upward look into his face, she extended her hand. "I am so glad!"

He took the little hand in his, bowed courteously—it seemed almost reverently—over it, and quit the room.

"He is kinder than he used to be," thought Jean, taking out a fresh sheet of paper. "How nice he is when he is like that. Shall I write another letter?" she hesitated. "No; perhaps it will be better to let papa see what Miss Orme said first, and then tell him what her nephew thinks. That is what I will do."

## CHAPTER X.

### IN THE LIBRARY.

THE following morning came a hesitating little tap at the library door. "Come in," called out Nugent Orme, stretching out his hand toward his pipe, with the expectation of seeing his aunt. The door opened, and Jean came shyly in, a pamphlet and a note

in her hand. "My cousin asked me to bring you this, Mr. Orme. The note will tell you what she thinks about it."

"You are very kind to bring it."

"Oh, it isn't kindness," absently, her eyes straying toward the treasures that lined the walls.

"I think you hardly do yourself justice," he replied, smiling.

"I meant that I shouldn't come if I did not wish to. I always gave the books and things to Mary to bring before, you know."

"Then I am very glad you have changed your mind," he replied, kindly, more amused at her outspokenness, and even the school-girl manner, than he would have once believed possible.

"May I wait while you are writing to Maud, please, Mr. Orme?"

"I shall be very glad if you will," wheeling a chair toward her.

"No, thank you; I thought perhaps you would let me look at the books!" and her eyes turned longingly toward them.

"Pray make yourself at home here in any way you like. I wish I had known you had a taste for reading before; but I hope you will now be friendly enough to help yourself." And he took the very best means to make her feel at home by himself becoming absorbed in the reply to Maud's note.

Nearly half an hour later—it required some reflection and reference to answer Maud's questions—he suddenly recollected Jean's presence, and looked toward her. If he had forgotten her, she had also very unmistakably forgotten him. Perched upon the top of the library-steps, with an open book in her lap, and one arm flung over two or three others by her side, as though she were afraid lest they should make to themselves wings and escape, she sat gloating over her treasure, her hair thrust back from her face, and her eyes fastened upon the page. How could he have been so blind all this time as not even to perceive the glorious possibilities in such a face and head as that? he wondered, his eyes dwelling upon the delicate grace of their contour, so well shown by her half-drooping attitude.

"Have you come upon some favorites, Miss Raymond?"

She slowly raised her eyes, took in the situation, and descended from her perch, her arms full of books.

"I have never seen them before, only some bits out of this one," she replied.

"Pray accept the freedom of the library from now; take any books you wish, and come here as often as you please."

"Oh, Mr. Orme, may I really? May I come when you are out?"

"If you prefer it, yes, certainly," he said, laughing as Nugent Orme very rarely laughed. "But," he presently added, "a moment, Miss Raymond. I see you have

got among the French authors. Perhaps I ought— May I look? Oh, I see 'Corinne.' Yes, that's safe enough, I suppose; but for the future I must ask you to allow me a voice in the selection. There is a great deal here which you might not care to wade through. What do you say to my making selections for you?"

"Thank you," a little slowly and doubtfully.

"What's the reservation, Miss Raymond?" he asked, quick to note the shade of disappointment in her face.

"I don't like selections. We used to have them at school. I should like to go all the way round, and read every one on the shelves, if there were time."

"I am afraid you would leave off with a very odd mixture of ideas," he replied, smiling. "Those shelves are weighted with a mass of contradictions."

"I don't see that it would make very much difference in the end, Mr. Orme; it would only be knowing so many more right things and wrong things than I know now, and that wouldn't hurt."

"Not the knowing more wrong things, as you term them?"

"No; I don't see why it should."

"I do not quite follow you."

"Because I don't know how to say it in the right way, Mr. Orme. I meant that if you knew things to be wrong, more knowledge of them would not make them seem right."

"I see," regarding her more intently. "But I am afraid you would not find right and wrong quite so distinctly defined and separated as you imagine. They are apt sometimes to run into such fine gradations, and at least appear to merge into each other. Many of the subtle philosophers there might make you imagine wrong was right as well as right was wrong."

"Only which I wanted it to be. I must incline one way the tiniest little in the beginning, you know, and all the rest would be only accumulation."

"I see; but how about free-will? You do not consider yourself responsible for the first inclinations, I suppose?"

"Yes I do; I think I always choose, Mr. Orme, and I would rather be responsible."

"Ah!" He looked curiously at her. "You have been reading this pamphlet, Miss Raymond?"

Her eyes fell, and the color rose to her brow, as she stammered out, "Cousin Maud gave it to me last night, and said I was to bring it to you this morning, so I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Mind! I had not the least idea you had a taste for such reading, or—"

"But I haven't a taste for it, Mr. Orme. I like novels, and fairy tales, and poetry, and all that much better; only I had not

any to read, and this was better than nothing."

"But you have read it carefully—critically?"

"I had to read it four times, and look out ever so many words in the dictionary, before I could understand it. It took me till twelve o'clock."

"But I can't conceive why you should take all that trouble about a thing that did not interest you."

"Because I did not understand it," she said, simply. "And after I had begun it I was not going to stop till I did. It was only like a hard lesson, you know, and I never minded them. I set myself lessons now sometimes, when I haven't any thing to read, because I like doing things that are hard to do."

"You must have been a very good pupil."

"So I was about lessons. Miss Bowles said she had no fault to find with me in that way; it was the wrong things that came between, you know."

"But I hope you do not incline most to the 'wrong things,' or how am I to trust you to the accumulations here?"

"I do not think I do *most*," she replied, with grave consideration. "I do not think I ever did much, only I didn't care about being good Miss Bowles's way, and did something wrong now and then just for a change, to try how it felt, you know; but since I have lived with Aunt Maria it has been quite different. I want to be good, and I would give any thing to be like my cousin Maud, Mr. Orme. Is this the note I am to give her?" she added, taking it from the table.

"Yes."

"And may I take this book for myself?"

"Take whatever you please. You will not find any thing much worse than false philosophy there, except— No, you shall run the gauntlet. There are Scott's novels in that corner."

"All those! I did not know that he had written more than two!"

He was gazing speculatively at her. In truth, he had not quite got over his surprise.

"You will let me come again?" she added anxiously, half afraid lest she had said something wrong and forfeited the privilege.

"Have I not given you the freedom of the library, Miss Raymond?" he replied, opening the door for her.

She gave him a grateful look and a little half courtesy, hugging her book to her heart as she went out.

Nugent Orme slowly returned to his seat, and took up the pamphlet again, although it was only to fall into a fit of abstraction over it. Odd that this girl should have hit the centre-point of the writer's fallacy, when Maud's quick intelligence had failed to find it. How was it that the writer's graceful

style, and, according to the premises laid down, logical accuracy, had failed so entirely with the one and fascinated the other? Was Jean one of those gifted with an intuition so rapid as not only to outstrip, but transcend the ordinary reasoning process—the intuition which constitutes the difference between a genius and an ordinary thinker? Though Jean confessed that she had to labor through the writer's subtle reasoning until she had mastered it, how very little effect it had had upon her judgment! As soon as she had mastered the meaning, she had divined the fallacy. And this was the girl he had so loftily looked down upon, whom they had all ignored! But, after all, what was it to him? It more concerned Louis Poynder than himself. He took up a mathematical treatise, his usual panacea against troublesome speculations, and resolutely plodded through a certain amount of work. But it had not its customary effect. No sooner had he laid it aside than he found his thoughts straying back to Jean again; and, annoyed with himself, he got up and went out.

Maud Poynder lay upon the couch, the personification of serene content, gazing abstractedly out of the open window, her fingers twining caressingly about Nugent Orme's note, which she had just read for the third or fourth time. How much trouble he had taken to go into the pros and cons of the question; how much respect he showed for her judgment even when he differed from her! Ah, how delightful it would be by-and-by—the constant communion with a mind like his! She pictured herself spending long hours with him in the dear old library, and all that was to come of it. How proud she would be to be the wife of a man who treated a woman as a responsible being, and appealed to her strength instead of to her weakness! If all men were like Nugent Orme, women would get their rights without having to fight for them. "But," she complacently thought on, "what are most of the women one meets? They have not enough intelligence to appreciate a greater—only sufficient to feel their own inferiority, and rebel at other people perceiving it." For Maud Poynder had not had the opportunity of measuring herself with many really intelligent women, and believed that she was superior to most of her sex. Moreover, she had the weakness which befalls many merely intellectual people—the pride of intellect. She little suspected that there was a much finer intellect than her own developing slowly but surely in the girl she so loftily looked down upon. Her own was simply the hard, narrow faculty, more capable of detecting a flaw in a chain of reasoning than of apprehending the truth or falsity of the premises. She had not the highest moral perception, and was entirely

devoid of imagination. She believed herself strong, but she had yet to learn that intellectual strength does not always insure moral strength. She had attained the one desire of her heart, and did not speculate as to what she might be were it withheld.

"So you ventured into the library at last, Jean," she said, with an indulgent smile at the young girl curled up on the carpet by the window, devouring her book. "I can not understand why you were so terribly afraid of Nugent Orme."

Jean reluctantly lifted her eyes from her book. "I was never afraid of him, Maud. He did not seem kind. It was not kind, if he was ever so clever, and I was ever so silly, to be always laughing at me. That wouldn't help me to grow wiser, you know. But I like him much better than I did."

"He ought to feel highly complimented, I am sure."

"Do you like him, Maud?"

"A little—yes," a rosy flush mounting to her brow.

"Ah, he does not make fun of you."

"No," with a supercilious curl of the well-shaped lips at the idea.

"I should not mind his laughing at me if he told me why, but it seems stupid if he does it because he thinks himself clever."

"He certainly is not stupid," returned Maud, highly amused. "He could not be both stupid and clever, you know."

"I meant he would be stupid if he looked down upon others for not being clever, Maud."

Maud laughed. "If you take to argue in that way, I must succumb, of course."

"I do not see why you need," simply replied Jean. After a moment's pause she went on, "But I do not really believe that Mr. Orme is not clever, Maud; I think he made fun of me because he was not kind."

"Why, that is worse and worse!"

"He is getting much kinder now—quite different. It was very kind of him to say I might have books from the library, and change them when I please."

"What has he selected for you?" a little curiously asked Maud.

"Oh, that's the best of it; I am to select for myself, and go into the library when he is out."

"Nugent ought to have had more—" she added, mentally. "But I suppose he guessed she would keep entirely to fiction, and there is nothing very dangerous in that way—nothing worse than old-fashioned romances there."

"I had 'Corinne' first, and this is Schiller."

"Whose translation?"

"I read French and German, Maud. I was to be a governess, you know."

"Oh yes, of course. I had forgotten." Maud regarded the young girl with languid

interest a few moments, thinking how little the knowledge had done for her. But of course it was not a critical knowledge, only the usual parrot learning of second-class schools. "She is quite incapable of appreciating Schiller!" She continued aloud, "I am glad to hear that Mr. Orme has won you at last."

"The reading part of me, Maud."

"And what part has Louis won?"

"Louis? Oh, he won my whole heart from the first!"

"You and he appear to appreciate each other; Louis is quite *épris* with you."

"I'm glad," quietly replied Jean, bending over her book again.

"The affair seems to be getting comfortably *en train*," thought Maud, once more turning her eyes toward the lovely scene without, and falling into a pleasant reverie. It never entered her head to talk to Jean upon any abstract subject. She always looked down upon her as a mere school-girl, with whom there could be no thought in common; and Jean knew almost as little about Maud. They were, indeed, strangers to each other, the only difference being that, in her enthusiastic admiration, Jean overrated her cousin, while Maud underrated her.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ON THE BRINK.

In her reply to Nugent Orme's note Maud appended a jesting allusion to his getting into the good graces of Jean. "You are really beginning to be taken into her favor, Nugent. Jean tells me that you have already won the reading part of her, whatever that may mean, by your offer to lend her books. But, seriously, you must look after the child a little, you know. It will never do to let one so untrained to thought roam at will among the shelves of the library. You must try to direct her choice a little. You would have been amused just now to see her puzzling over Schiller. For Louis's sake do your best for her."

Nugent Orme pondered long over this letter, his eyes fixed upon that last sentence. How was it that Maud knew so very little about her cousin? Jean seemed to have quite an exalted opinion of her. He had come to be somewhat ashamed of his own past grand airs with the girl. How was it that Maud remained blind? Surely she ought to have made a better estimate by this time. For Louis's sake! Was there any real likelihood of that, then? If so, he would strive his best, not for Louis's sake alone, but for Jean's. Throwing aside the letter—he did not know how impatiently—he paced up and down the room in not very pleasant thought.

Since that memorable morning when Louis

had been unguarded enough to allow Nugent to get a glimpse into his real nature, they had never succeeded in being on the old footing with each other again. Louis could not quite forgive the other for having, as he termed it, led him on to show his hand and then turned round upon him. It was all very well for Orme to take high ground. He had all he wanted, and could not tell what he would have been under different circumstances. What right had he to set up as a censor of other people's morals? Orme was getting less and less like his old self, and would become a regular prig if he went on at that rate. There were rumors afloat about his attending workmen's meetings in London, setting up a sort of business for helping poor tradesmen and others with small loans, and all sorts of bosh of that kind—evidence that he was degenerating into the conventional good young man.

On his side, Nugent Orme's sentiments toward Louis were undergoing a change. He could not get over that morning's revelation, and, though he tried to appear the same as usual, he was conscious that the effort must be evident to the other. They were each a great deal more ceremonious with each other than of old. In fact, neither could have attempted the old railery now without becoming personal. The quips, and jests, and laughing rebukes, which are between congenial natures the salt of friendship, become offensive when attempted where friendship is not. For Louis's sake! He, Nugent, was asked to do his best for Jean on the chance that, when Louis had quite made up his mind he could not do without her money, he might throw the handkerchief toward her, while he would have preferred "little Jessie," as he called her, a girl ready to talk to any man who chose to buy a bag of cakes.

So Maud found the latter portion of her note passed over without comment in his reply. "Dear Nugent, it was too much asking him to take Jean in hand!" smiled happy Maud.

It seemed that he was not to have the chance, if he desired it. He saw very little of Jean, though he found that she availed herself of the privilege to borrow books; they were taken during his absence. But he amused himself by watching her reading, not a little curious, as well as amused, at the course she took, which he traced by the gaps left in the shelves—a course growing daily more erratic. "From the 'Seven Champions' to the old Fathers! What makes you keep among them, young lady?" he mused, following her as she tried one after the other of the ancient folios, and, after an apparent cursory glance, changed it again. "Representative men! We are getting a little nearer. Which is it we want? Ah! 'A Skeptic upon Dogma.' I must inquire into that, I think."

So at luncheon he said, "I am curious to know why you choose the book you are reading now, Miss Raymond. May I ask?"

She flushed rosy red, and then grew pale again. "I did not think you knew," she stammered.

"Nothing objectionable or unfit for a young lady's reading, I hope?" put in Miss Orme, looking disapprovingly at the young girl's conscious, downcast face. "What is the book called, Miss Raymond?"

"A book upon theology, Aunt Jemmy," said Nugent Orme, coming to the rescue, and getting a shy look of gratitude from Jean.

"I'm glad to hear it," returned Miss Orme, to whom the word "theology" was enough. "You should let me make out a list for you, my dear. I dare say there are many books in the library which are not exactly suited for a young girl's reading, though valuable enough to a scholar. I have some much more suitable in my own little collection, which I shall be very happy to lend you; light, as well as solid reading—Pollock's 'Course of Time,' Chapon's letters, Mrs. Barbauld's works, Hofland's stories, Kirk White's poems, etc., all excellently adapted for forming character. But I fear you read a little too much. I hear you take books out into the grounds, and—"

"Saunders wants your decision about the old walnut-tree, Aunt Jemmy. He thinks it will have to come down at last."

"Does he? I will speak to him about it immediately after luncheon," said Miss Orme, quite alive to the importance of giving a decision. Then she went on to enlarge upon the tree's history to Jean, from the date when it was planted by her grandfather, too much absorbed in the subject to give a thought to any thing else.

The following morning was spent by Nugent Orme in sauntering about the grounds, though he did not acknowledge to himself that he had any object in so doing. If he had any latent desire to come upon Jean, it did not seem likely that it would be gratified. As it neared the luncheon hour he turned toward the house. He had got into the lower grounds, and had to pass the lake, and, when nearly opposite to it, noticed that the boat had been taken over to the island. Was she there? She unconsciously answered for herself; just at the moment emerging from amidst the trees which half hid the temple in the centre of the island, she came down to the water's edge, got into the boat, and rowed herself toward the point where he stood. He might easily have remained out of sight by keeping among the trees where he was, had he chosen so to do; but he advanced into the open space, and held the boat's head for her as it touched the shore.

"Mr. Orme!" with a look of not altogether pleased surprise.

"You should let one of the men row you across, Miss Raymond. This boat is too heavy for a lady."

"Oh no, thank you. I am a very strong girl, and it would spoil it all if I had to be taken and fetched back again. It's so nice to feel out of every body's reach."

"Like a princess on a desert island, I suppose. Do you carry your books to the temple? I must have it made more worthy of such use."

"No, please do not. I don't care about being in the temple; it's so tight and neat, and I don't like sitting in a chair. I've found a lovely little nook the other side, where you can't hear a sound but the birds, and can not see any thing but trees and sky and water. I can fancy myself upon a desert island, really, you know. And I've made such a nice *cache* for my books in the hollow of a tree." Then she recollected that she owed him some thanks for his consideration at luncheon the day before.

"It was so kind of you not to tell about what I am reading yesterday, Mr. Orme."

"Ah, if you had tried my little finger you would have known you might trust me."

She laughed out merrily. "Do you know about that? I thought only school-girls crooked little fingers about keeping secrets." She went on more seriously, "I did not want Miss Orme to know, because—because she thinks I am not nice already, and I was afraid she might ask me for the title of the book, and say it was not proper for me before I had finished it."

"I do not in the least subscribe to my aunt's views of what is proper in the reading way, Miss Raymond. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge to feeling some little curiosity respecting your choice of that book."

She averted her eyes, and, unlike her frank, outspoken self, made no reply. He went on in a light, bantering tone, his eyes fastened upon her downcast face, "Will you allow me to ask why you desire to look at things from a skeptic's point of view, Miss Raymond?"

"I did not think you would miss it," she murmured.

But he wanted his answer. "I do not fancy you are inclined to be skeptical?"

"No; only I wanted to—see—what skepticism is really like."

"Why?"

She hesitated a moment, then raised her eyes to his, and blurted out, as she had been accustomed to blurt out her misdeeds to Miss Bowles when it came to the worst, "I heard Mrs. Cleveland condoling with Mrs. Orme about your being a skeptic; she said her husband sadly feared you were becoming a confirmed one—and I wanted to find out what a skeptic really thinks. The dictionary doesn't help much, you know."



"I feel honored by your taking so much interest in my opinions," he said, gravely.

"It is not exactly that. You told me the other day that I puzzled you, Mr. Orme; well, you puzzle me just as much. I can not understand how it was that I did not like you at first, and I wanted to find out your thoughts about things, so as to know more about you."

"But how if you start from false premises—how if Mrs. Cleveland and Mrs. Cleveland's husband were mistaken in their verdict?"

"Are you a skeptic?"

"I am not quite sure."

"I would know what I was."

He smiled, "So would I if I could; but the knowledge is not so easily gained by some people as by others; some of us seem to have such complicated machinery. But perhaps I am a little inclined to be skeptical upon some points."

"I wouldn't be a little of any thing," impatiently kicking a pebble down toward the water.

"Surely it's better to be a little than a great deal wrong?"

"No—I don't know; I would as soon be—" Breaking off, she looked up into his face with earnest, questioning eyes, and added, "Don't you *want* the things to be true?"

"Things?"

"Don't you want every thing beautiful to be true, Mr. Orme?" in a low voice.

"I think I do, Miss Raymond." Smiling at her little impatient gesture, he added, "Well, I am sure I do. But we are not all gifted with precisely the same amount of perception. Some have to go through a slow process of getting at the truth before they see its beauty; while others seem to be in immediate affinity with the beautiful (finding acquaintance there, 'as dear old Herbert' has it); and to such the truth comes more readily."

"But I don't see why any one should want unlovely things to be true."

"Things again? Will not you be more definite?"

"You know what I mean."

"Well, perhaps I do; and in that case you must let me say a word for the author you are reading; he—"

"Oh, don't; please don't!"

"Have you taken such a rooted prejudice against him as all that?"

"I was not thinking of him, but you. I *want* to like you, Mr. Orme. You have been so kind to me latterly, and Maud says she likes you."

"There is all the greater necessity to tell you that I think you have been confounding the meaning of the term 'skeptical' with that of 'infidel,' a very common error in these days, and a very unfortunate one. Skepti-

cism is not infidelity, but something essentially different, the former being merely a state of inquiry, while the latter admits of no arguments. Many minds are so constituted that they have to pass through a stage of doubt or skepticism before they can attain any truth."

"The author I am reading is an infidel, then."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because he *wants* the things to be wrong. He seems so much more anxious to prove what is wrong than what is right. If he were only a skeptic, as you say, he would be only inquiring after the truth. But he does not. See how glad he is when he thinks he has proved something wrong. I felt just as though he were crowing over me when I got to the fourth chapter, and gave him a good thump—I mean the book, you know."

"Blow for blow!" he ejaculated, highly amused. "Is that your creed?"

"Are you an infidel, Mr. Orme?"

"Very decidedly not! But I must plead guilty to being as yet only on my way to certain 'things,' as you term them; and being only on the way, I pick up all the information I can for and against."

"Why against?"

"Because one likes to hear both sides when a case is to be decided by evidence. You yourself like to do that sometimes, Miss Raymond, or you would have been content to accept the Cleveland verdict against me, you see."

"Yes; that is true."

"Therefore you are committed to ascertain whether my skepticism is likely to lead to infidelity before you condemn it. You are bound to give a judgment now, and to do it fairly you must go through a little of the kind of reading I indulge in. You will get into a motley company; but you will begin to see a little method in the madness after a while, perhaps. I think I shall introduce you to some of the mystics, to begin with, as a sort of corrective to the rationalism you have just been going through. Old Jacob Behmen will be as good a leap from the author you have been fighting as that was from the 'Seven Champions.'"

"Oh, there's Louis!" she exclaimed, suddenly catching sight of him as he advanced from amidst the trees, and running toward him. Then, keeping her hand in his, she turned with him toward Nugent Orme, again looking up into his face, and chattering away like the school-girl she still was at intervals, although the intervals were getting wider apart.

"You have not been ever so long, Louis; three whole days! And I have missed you so much!"

He smiled down into the clear brown eyes, accepting it all very graciously. It was quite right and proper that she should miss

him, although he had been far enough from missing her.

"Three days is not long, you exacting child! Ah, Orme; frightfully hot, isn't it?"

The two men shook hands.

"I suppose so, walking in the road. I've only been lounging under the trees."

"And how do you manage to get through the time, Jean?" asked Louis.

"Oh, in all sorts of ways; delightfully, sometimes with Maud and sometimes out—out here generally. Mr. Orme lends me books, Louis, and I've found out such a nice place to hide and read them in. I row over to the island, and fancy myself hundreds and thousand of miles away from any body, and it is so nice!"

"You don't pull that great heavy boat yourself?"

"I have just been telling Miss Raymond that she ought to let one of the men pull her across," said Nugent Orme.

"Of course you ought, Jean. You will quite spoil your hands. I hate to see a woman with coarse hands."

Jean looked ruefully down at the little ungloved hands, which, though brown enough, could not be justly termed coarse, and said, with a sigh, "I don't think they would become white if I were ever so careful, Louis."

Some one else looked at them, and involuntarily wondered how it was that he had ever admired white hands.

"Maud all right?" asked Louis.

"Yes; Dr. Travers says he thinks that she may be able to come down in ten days or a fortnight now."

"Meantime you are all doing your best to spoil her, I suppose?" They walked slowly toward the house, and perhaps a little glad to have Jean to talk to instead of Nugent Orme, who was looking unusually grave. Louis went on, "And how goes on the romance, Jean?"

She cast a vexed little side-look up into his face, as she replied, "You are always laughing at me now, Louis." In truth, he seemed to be adopting the bantering tone which Nugent Orme had once used toward her.

"But the epic; is it finished yet?" he laughed.

"Oh, Louis, please! You shouldn't tell about me, when you said you wouldn't."

"Are you writing a poem, Miss Raymond?" said Nugent Orme, glancing at her flushed face.

"I tried to make some verses once, but they wouldn't finish."

"Very unkind of them, wasn't it, Orme? And how about the picture? Have you sent it to one of the exhibitions, or would that also not finish?"

"Oh, Louis, that is not fair, because you found that little etching! There is no harm

in trying, is there, Mr. Orme? Besides, I can not help it. Don't you feel sometimes as though the beautiful things were worrying you to say something about them, Louis?"

"I can't say that I do."

"Then it's because I'm a girl, I suppose. Maud says it will go off as I grow older, but it hasn't begun to yet."

"But you should not encourage it, Jean. Romance and all that sort of thing may be excusable, perhaps, in a girl of fifteen; but it is at no time attractive, and a romantic woman is a 'caution,' as the Americans say."

"I should not like to be a 'caution,'" gravely returned Jean. "I wonder why it is so wrong to be romantic? Loving beautiful things can not be wrong."

"At best it is only a lazy habit to be dreaming away your time over them."

"Ah, no; they do not let you rest long enough to be lazy; you are soon set to work again finding out."

"Finding out!" he repeated, impatiently. "If you do not take care you will become eccentric, Jean! I can't endure eccentric women."

She slipped her hand into his again, looking pleadingly up into his face. What made him like this, almost as though he were cross with her? What had she done? He smiled graciously down at her, patting the little hand, and thinking how manageable she would be by-and-by.

Nugent Orme walked gravely on. Was it true, then—was this—this *priceless* jewel to be cast before swine? The other's complacent tone of proprietorship was insufferable to him, and he believed that it was simply Louis Poynder's unworthiness and want of appreciation that angered him. He glanced at the eloquent face, unconsciously budding into beauty as the soul struggled to free itself from the childish bonds which confined it. God help her, if she sacrificed herself while her perception was but half developed. And yet—the girlish freedom of her bearing toward Louis was more like that of a sister toward a brother than any thing else. When love came it would not develop in that way—surely not in a nature such as hers! And Nugent Orme found great relief in the conviction—for Jean's sake.

## CHAPTER XII.

### FIRST LOVE.

THE luncheon moment (Miss Orme's time was precious enough to be counted by moments) was exceeded by a full minute and a half when the three reached the dining-room. But Jean was spared the lecture prepared for her upon want of punctuality when

the little lady saw Louis. A certain allowance must be made for lovers—when the right kind of people fell in love with each other. Fancying Louis was a little cross with her, Jean tried her best to conciliate him during luncheon; and although Miss Orme did not admire her very open way of showing her love for her cousin, she now quite approved her feeling it. Had not she, Jemima Orme, decided that the match was to come about? She carried a glowing account of the promising state of things up to Maud, as soon as Louis had taken his departure.

Maud listened complacently enough. She did not at all object to other people being happy, and when she went down-stairs it would be just as well that Louis and Jean should be absorbed in each other, and take themselves out of the way. According to Miss Orme, Jean's was certainly an odd way of showing her love. To Maud's refined taste it seemed to show great want of delicacy for the girl to be letting every one see her partiality at this early stage. But, then, Jean always had been peculiar. "I never knew any one so utterly regardless of the *convenances*. I really should not be much surprised to hear that she had taken the initiative, and told Louis she loved him before he asked her. Nugent's opinion of her was evident enough." His uniform silence respecting Jean—even when she challenged him with some good-humored little jest about the girl—was expressive of a great deal from one of his calibre, thought Maud. But presently she looked a little doubtfully at Miss Orme. "You think it is really love, dear? Jean has always been very attached to Louis, and frank in her manner toward him."

"We shall see, my dear; time will show," nodded and smiled Miss Orme. Time soon began to show a great deal to those that could read. Had Maud felt more interest in Jean she might have noticed how different she was becoming to her former self as days went on. Her character had been slowly developing ever since her arrival at Fernside; but this was some new kind of development. She still had occasional little *divertissements* of fun and frolic; but during the intervals she was silent and abstracted, shrinking shyly away from notice, passing her time in a way which nothing but love for her cousin Louis would have justified in Miss Orme's eyes. In truth, Jean was reveling in a new existence—the tender delight of first love, returning again and again to take a shy peep through the gates of Elysium, and advancing a little nearer each time, half conscious that she carried a key in her bosom with which to unlock them at will. This was what the stars and trees and flowers had tried to tell her when she had stood vaguely wondering and admiring apart!

Now every beautiful thing that lived and grew seemed to take her into its confidence. She spent most of the long days out in the open air (Maud could bear her absence philosophically enough, and Miss Orme was immersed in her multitudinous occupations), her senses steeped in the summer glories about her, her imagination feeding to almost dangerous excess upon the dainty food presented to it. When obliged to make her appearance, she shyly slipped out of notice as much as possible, guiltily conscious of her secret. But the truth was writing itself on her face to those that could read the new light in the brown eyes, the soft, tender, surprised look of the soul timidly stepping into womanhood and love together, the very voice melodiously softening and trembling with the rhythm of her thoughts. Unaccustomed as she was to dissemble, every look and tone told her secret.

It was a lovely July evening. Jean had softly improvised Miss Orme into her afternoon nap, and herself wandered into dream-land, her eyes turned toward a last streak of gold where the sun had sunk behind the distant hills, while the soft summer moonlight stole in through the open windows to lie at her feet.

"For then thy soul did beckon unto mine,  
And then my soul went trembling out to thine.  
Then I began to live."

"Are those the words to your music, Miss Raymond?"

"Mr. Orme!" she ejaculated, with a startled, guilty look, scattering the moonbeam into broken, quivering lights about her, as she hastily rose from her seat and peered into the shadow.

"I like to listen to your playing." How many nights had he quietly entered, and sat unsuspected and unperceived listening to her!

She stood silent, asking herself in a nervous, frightened way what he had heard. What had she done and said? Perhaps he suspected the cause of her fear. He went on kindly, "But I did not feel privileged to hear more than your playing. Whose music have you been playing to-night?"

"Oh, any body's, any thing," she replied, nervously shrinking into the shadow. "Miss Orme likes it because I play without lights, and it sends her to sleep."

"I do not exactly sleep, my dear," put in the little lady, catching the latter part of Jean's sentence; "but I enjoy a little quiet reflection in the twilight. When you have gained a little more experience, you will, I hope, perceive the advantage to be derived from cultivating a habit of reflection. I should never have done what I have had I not accustomed myself to carefully weigh and consider the consequences of my actions."

Jean felt that Nugent Orme had noiseless-

ly quitted the room, and, greatly relieved, tried to do her share toward what the little lady called conversation until tea and lights made their appearance. So Miss Orme rambled on, devoting the half-hour to Jean's improvement, quite satisfied with an occasional monosyllable from the young girl in reply.

When tea made its appearance Louis Poynder came in, and presently afterward Nugent Orme. The former had come, at his mother's anxious suggestion, to do a little love-making; but, rather out of humor at having to give up an evening just now (why couldn't they let him have his freedom until she returned to Fernside?), he went through the process as though under protest.

"Are not you well, Louis?" asked Jean. Of late, since words had come to have a new meaning to her, the "dear" had been left out in speaking to her cousin.

"Not very," he grumbled. "A wretched headache." In truth, the effects of the previous night's excess in drinking and smoking clung about him more pertinaciously than usual.

"I am so sorry. May I get you any thing—some eau-de-Cologne?"

"No; strong coffee is the best thing."

Begged by Miss Orme to make himself at home, he reclined in an easy-chair, and allowed Jean to wait upon him.

She brought his cup to his side, placing it on a little table within his reach, and he lazily gave her a little nod for thanks. Then his eyes dwelt upon her face for a moment, and something—he hardly knew what—aroused his attention.

"Why, what's come to you to-night, Jean?" he said, staring at her with puzzled eyes.

"Come to me?" she echoed, consciously.

"Yes. How brilliant you look!"

"There's no difference," she murmured, the long lashes drooping over the tell-tale eyes. "This is the same dress you have seen me wear before."

No, the brilliance, or whatever it was, was not owing to what she wore. She had on a simple white, sprigged muslin dress, made high to the slender throat and close to the wrists, with nothing in the shape of ornament save a dead-gold locket suspended to a small chain, and a few geranium blossoms at her waist. He was quite aware that the difference was not in her dress. She had emerged from the school-girl stage of existence at last, and was vastly improved by the change, to say nothing of a certain something else which was equally apparent to him, and equally approved.

"I did not mean it was owing to your dress, child," he said, catching hold of her hand and complacently enjoying her confusion. "Why, Jean, you are getting good-looking!"

She stood consciously flushing and paling,

striving in vain to withdraw her hand from his grasp, while he lay back in his chair lazily regarding her, critically appraising every feature and tint and expression—the soft, rosy blush, in its way almost as pretty as Jessie's more vividly contrasted pink and white; the hair, which, though brown instead of flaxen, had so much gold in it; the delicate yet firm contour of the face and head, and the undeniably graceful figure—coming to a more satisfactory conclusion respecting the separate items than he had hitherto done. Some men might style her almost handsome. Smiling up into her face, and taking no heed of her efforts to free her hand, he went on in a low voice, "If you would take a little more pains with yourself, you would be positively good-looking, Jean. Why don't you dress your hair in the new way?" (she wore it coiled in great twists about her head, notwithstanding the fashion just setting in for puffing and frizzing). "It would suit you capitally."

"Don't," she murmured. "Louis, please let me go."

"What are you blushing so furiously about, child? Why, what a tell-tale face you have got, Jean?"

"You are unkind. Let me go."

"First promise me that you will try the new way of dressing your hair. Come, say you will to please me," he said, holding her hand fast, and highly enjoying her confusion.

"I can not, Louis. I tried when you wanted me to before; but it was such a trouble, and made my head hot, and I got into a temper."

"Was it the frizettes or the temper that made your head hot, child? Come, promise me to try again!"

"No," decidedly, though in a low voice.

"Not to oblige me?" getting a little impatient.

"I don't want to disoblige you, Louis, but—"

"You won't oblige me?"

"I don't want to do my hair differently," she murmured.

He looked another moment or two at her half-averted, blushing face, and came to a conclusion which satisfied himself. He remembered having once told her (before the fashion changed) that she wore her hair very becomingly arranged. That any other person might have told her the same, or, having told her, could have sufficient influence to prevent her altering the fashion of her hair, never occurred to him.

"Jean, dear, we are waiting," gently put in Miss Orme, having, as she thought, given them quite indulgence enough for the time being.

Louis lifted the little hand still struggling in his grasp to his lips, and then released it. "I suppose I must let you have your way this time, little tyrant."

"I'm not little—and—and I wish you wouldn't speak to me in that way."

"What way, child?"

"It's the tone or—something." She was hardly conscious what it was that jarred upon her.

"Nonsense; don't be critical, Jean," taking up his cup with half a yawn. He must not allow her to grow exacting.

Jean entered into the fuller light round the table with a hot blush still burning in her cheeks. How grateful she felt that Nugent Orme seemed too much absorbed in the review he was reading to notice her! She did not know that one quick glance had taken note both of Louis's little demonstration and her own confusion.

"Bring me some more coffee, Jean," presently said Louis. She slowly carried it toward him, but this time could not be induced to remain a moment longer than was necessary to place the cup by his side. "I must teach her not to be so skittish," he thought, "when I take her regularly in hand. Some fellows like all that sort of thing, but I don't."

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### IN THE WOODS.

MISS ORME had seen quite enough to set her mind completely at rest. The following morning she informed Maud and her mother (the latter had come over to spend a few hours with her daughter) that there could no longer be any doubt about it. Jean was deeply attached to her cousin. "I told you that you might leave every thing to me, you know, my dears," smiled the little lady, feeling that she had brought it all about. "You should have seen them last night. Quite lovers, I assure you. Between ourselves, they were quite demonstrative. Nugent looked almost shocked."

"Then Louis did come last night?" said Mrs. Poynder, with a momentary look of relief; for, though she had begged him to go to the Grange, she was by no means certain that he had done so. Poor Mrs. Poynder was looking terribly harassed. Unfortunately, she could not ease her mind by opening her heart, and hers was a mind naturally requiring many props in the way of sympathy and encouragement. But she knew how angry Maud would be if she were told about her brother's entanglements. Dear Maud was herself so strong and superior to temptation of any kind, that she did not make quite sufficient allowance for poor Louis. Young men were so beset with temptation. Then, as dear Louis said, his uncle's cruel conduct about the money had affected his prospects so much more than Maud's. The latter would not feel the loss

of the money when she was Nugent's wife, while, at best, poor Louis would be forced into a marriage with a girl he did not care about (he had been very open with his mother upon that point), and owe every thing to the generosity of his wife. Therefore, although she was gratified to hear that Jean was in love with her cousin, since the marriage was a necessity, she was not so much elated about it as Miss Orme, and perhaps Maud, had expected her to be.

"How is Louis going on, mamma?" asked Maud, with a sharp side-glance at her mother's face, when Miss Orme had presently pleaded her important morning duties, and bustled away to attend to her flowers, and do what old Saunders irreverently termed her half-hour's mischief in the garden. "How any one as had a eye for flowers could aggravate them in the way the missis did wi' they scissors," puzzled Saunders. And yet the old man could not find in his heart to utter a stronger expression of his disapproval than a grunt when the little lady pointed to the promising shoots in her basket as a proof of her industry, her face radiant with good humor.

"Going on, dear?" repeated Mrs. Poynder. "Oh, very well—the same as usual."

Maud noted the averted face, and nervous, fluttering hands, and drew her own conclusions. "A good thing for Louis, Jean's taking it into her head to fall in love with him. But take my advice, mamma; urge him to have it settled as soon as possible."

"He won't bear much urging, you know, dear."

"And yet he hasn't sense enough to act without it."

"It is rather hard for him to have to look to his wife for what he has always been taught to consider his own, Maud."

"It would be a great deal harder for him to have to do without the money. He is quite sharp enough to know that. Besides, she will do quite as well as any one else for him. He is not likely to be very exacting—unless he married a superior woman. So long as his wife fancies him perfect, and falls down and worships him, he won't be hard upon her little weaknesses. But tell him from me that he is very unwise to delay the engagement. If Uncle Oliver should take it into his head to surprise us by coming back unexpectedly, he might also take it into his head to make a few inquiries about Louis's tastes and habits before giving his consent, supposing he keeps in his present mood about the girl. He might object to such little escapades as—"

"I will tell Louis what you say, dear," hurriedly put in Mrs. Poynder. "I quite think with you that the engagement ought to be settled as quickly as possible."

"I wish you would try sometimes to think a little *without* me, mamma. You would not

then get talked over by Louis as you do. I expect to find money matters in inextricable confusion when I return. He manages to get every penny out of you as soon as it comes in."

To which poor Mrs. Poynder could only reply by murmuring a few indefinite words. Then, anxious to begin a fresh topic, she said, with a conciliatory smile, "When am I to congratulate *you*, dear Maud? Your future promises to be quite unclouded."

Maud smiled. "Nugent and I look at things from the same point of view; a very different one to most people's, mamma."

"Ah, yes; you are so admirably suited to each other; both so clever, and with exactly the same tastes."

"Don't forget to tell Louis to make sure."

Trotting about with her basket of snippings, Miss Orme caught sight of her nephew slowly pacing one of the alleys, and hastened toward him. "Ah, Nugent, dear, I am glad to see you out. So much better than poring over books this hot weather. It is studying so much that has made you look so pale and depressed latterly. Only yesterday Mrs. Cleveland was saying how very unlike yourself you have been looking of late, and I told her I felt sure it was over-study. You will not have long to wait now for a companion; Dr. Travers says dear Maud may come down to-morrow or the next day. He wanted to make quite sure, or she might have ventured a week ago. Really my hands will be quite full, with two pairs of lovers to manage! I suppose Louis has told you that it is as good as settled between Jean and him. They made it evident enough last night, did they not? I do not quite approve of cousins marrying; but this is an exceptional case. As dear Maud says, it is better that Louis should get his rights so than not get them at all. Are you going *that* way, Nugent, dear? It is nearly luncheon-time, you know."

He muttered something she did not hear, and strode away. Turning through the plantations, he made his way toward the woods, disregarding the path, and pushing blindly through the under-wood, as though taking a sort of fierce delight in battling against some obstacle. He did not make his appearance at luncheon. Mrs. Poynder had been with some difficulty persuaded to stay, and hastened her departure afterward as much as possible. She was restless and uncomfortable about her son, anxious to act upon Mand's suggestion as soon as possible. And, besides, the Indian mail was due; letters might arrive by the afternoon's post, and they might contain news of importance to them all. There was always the chance that Oliver might change his mind again, and do justice to her children as well as to Jean. Miss Orme accompanied her in the pony carriage, and on her return

found Jean standing in the middle of the road impatiently watching for her. But no time was given for the intended lecture upon the impropriety of the proceeding. Before the little lady had time for a word Jean sprung on to the step of the carriage, caught the letter from her nerveless fingers, and with a joyous laugh ran off with it.

Into the grounds, and turning to the left, toward the woods, on she sped, clasping the precious letter to her heart, until she had penetrated far into the leafy solitude. Pale and almost breathless with excitement, she sat down upon the trunk of a fallen tree and opened her letter.

"Oh, the joy of it, papa, darling! the joy of it! It only wanted this!" she ejaculated, after hurriedly glancing through it. Holding it against her cheek, her eyes full of delicious tears, she laughed and nodded to the trees and ferns. "Remember your first leaves, dear; think when the sun first kissed you, darling, and laugh with me."

A shadow from behind blotted out a streak of sunshine, which had found its way through the boughs to kiss her hands. She turned, and saw Nugent Orme moving hastily and silently away.

"Mr. Orme! Oh, I'm so glad! Don't go," she impulsively went on. "Do come and help me to bear it."

"Trouble!" he exclaimed, turning sharply toward her. "Oh no, I see," he added, with a short laugh at his own absurdity, as he glanced at her radiant face.

She tapped the tree by her side. "Come and let me tell you."

He slowly and hesitatingly advanced a few steps, paused again, and finally sat down by her side.

"He's coming home to me!"

"Mr. Raymond—your father?"

"Yes; soon, in a week or two from then, that means nearly now."

"A week or two from then means nearly now?"

She laughed out joyously. "Was ever so much happiness! May I read some of it to you? Do let me." And she proceeded to flatten out the letter upon her knees, and read little scraps out to him, fancying he heard them.

Could she have seen the eyes fastened upon her downcast face!

"I am glad to find that you do not consider your education to have been finished at school, and that you seem in earnest about trying to improve yourself. But I trust you do not encourage the tendency which I regret to perceive in your letters toward romantic notions about people and things, and that—" She stopped, giving a shy look up into her companion's grave face, unconscious that he had not heard the beginning of the sentence, and that she might have left out the rest without his being any the wiser.

Fancying that she stopped because she observed his abstraction, he hastily gathered back his thoughts, and said, quietly, "I am listening."

She sat silent a few moments, her eyes shyly veiling themselves, a rosy flush dyeing her cheeks, and a happy, conscious smile upon her lips; then she pointed out the sentence for him to read it himself.

"Do you wish me to read it?" he said gently, striving hard not to look at her—not to indulge in the dangerous intoxication of the moment.

She nodded—turning her face away—and he read aloud,

"Your Aunt Maria seems to hint that there is some love nonsense going on; but I hope your time is better employed. Try to occupy yourself with some useful woman's work, and prevent your mind from dwelling upon such things, which are only weaknesses at your age, and for some time to come."

"Very good advice, only it comes a little too late, does it not, Jean?" He had forced himself to say something, though he hardly knew what; quite unaware that he had used her Christian name, or that there was any thing unusual in his way of speaking.

Her soul vibrated to the tenderness of his tone, as he unconsciously dwelt upon her name. She swayed toward him, bowed her blushing face upon his arm, and lifted her father's letter to his lips.

"Great heavens!"

"What is it?" she asked; nestling closer to his side, and looking nervously round, then up into his face, from which every vestige of color had fled—misery and a sort of wild delight fiercely battling for the mastery in his eyes. "Are you ill?" (sinking her voice), "Nugent?"

He put her from him—gently, tenderly, ah, how lingeringly! but from him; and stumbled blindly to his feet. She rose, and stood white and still before him—waiting. She knew now, in a numb sort of way, that some blow was to come.

"God help us!"

"Us—us?" Her heart began to beat again.

"I believed it would only fall upon me!" he muttered. "How can I bear it if she, too, must suffer?"

"Suffer? If there is any thing to be suffered, may not I bear it with you, Nugent?"

"God help us!" he repeated, gazing at her with miserable, yearning eyes; but not daring to venture a step toward her.

"Is it because of what papa says, Nugent? He will not mind when he knows how much I—"

"Hush, Jean, child; you must not go on." In his misery, he added, "How do you know that I— Oh, Jean, have I let you see my love?"

A shy smile parted her lips as she whis-

pered, "Yes." Had not his every look and tone told her—had not her own love taught her to read the signs? Even now, though she saw that some trial was impending, she did not for an instant doubt his love.

"God forgive me. How shall I tell you? I believed myself in love with Maud Poynder, and for years our engagement has been looked upon as a matter of course. She expects me—she has a right to expect me—to ask her to be my wife." He flung his arms along the spreading branch of a tree and buried his face upon them.

"Cousin Maud!" she whispered, white and trembling. "And I have come between you—oh, Nugent, you let me do it!"

"They said you were the same as engaged to your cousin."

"Louis!"

"And—the possibility of this did not occur to me, how could I suppose?—Jean, you do not think me capable of trying to gain your love while I was engaged to another woman?"

"No, Nugent."

"I thought I was strong, and tried to satisfy myself with some wretched sophistry about being able in time to bury my dead and act honorably to poor Maud. God help me, Jean, I little thought that it would be at the cost of wronging you!"

"You have not wronged me, and you will be honorable to Maud."

Yes; that was her decision, no other could be expected from her, he knew that; and, if possible, loved her the better for knowing it, the sharp agony it cost him notwithstanding. But to have brought this shadow upon her young life! "To have brought this upon you, Jean—I that would gladly lay down my life to—" He broke down once more.

She laid her hand upon his arm: "Do not be troubled about me, Nugent; I am not sorry for having loved you if it does no wrong to Maud, and we will be true to her now!"

He looked down at her drooping face with tender, yearning eyes. But one—only one kiss upon the sweet brow! But Nugent Orme was stronger than he gave himself credit for being, and stood apparently passive beneath her touch, though his heart was beating heavily.

"Jean! Jean!"

"We must never meet again—like this." Then, in her tender, loving anxiety to exonerate him, she added: "But you must not blame yourself, Nugent; indeed, indeed, I do not blame you."

"Jean! Jean!"

"Say good-bye to me, Nugent."

He was battling against his lower self, and no word would come from his parched lips.

"Good-bye," she whispered, turning away. Haggard and exhausted, but victorious,

he placed his hand upon her bowed head and mentally bade good-bye to all that was truest and best and loveliest to him in the world, then said gently, "God keep you, Jean."

She lifted his passive hand to her lips and was gone.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MAUD'S FLOWERS.

WHEN the second bell rang, Jean crept down with throbbing heart and lagging steps to the dining-room. How could she meet him? Ah, if she could only have absented herself from the dinner-table that once! How hard it had been to resist the inclination to plead a headache, or what not, and remain in her own room! But he must never know how heavy her burden was to bear—she must spare him that. Fortunately, the long discipline at Ivy Lodge was of some service to her now. She had not been accustomed to abstain from doing a thing because she disliked doing it. To her great relief, she found Miss Orme alone.

"I do not know what has become of my nephew. He is getting rather irregular about meals, I am afraid. He did not come in to luncheon, but it is very unusual for him to be absent at dinner. Dear Nugent, I noticed that he was not looking quite himself this morning. He is naturally inclined to be rather delicate, too, though no one would suppose it by his appearance. But for my unceasing care he might not have lived to manhood," sighed the little lady; daintily enjoying the idea as a sort of relish to her chicken, and going on to comfort herself with the reflection that it was wrong to be over-anxious. "He may have staid in the town, or been prevailed upon to dine at Fernside, or something of that kind, you know, my dear."

Jean murmured something in assent.

"You are looking paler than usual yourself, my dear," said the little lady, kindly. Fortunately for Jean, she complacently went on to account for it in her own way, deciding that the young girl was too much out in the heat of the day.

"Do not you feel well enough to play a little to-night, Jean?" she asked, missing the usual accompaniment to her after-dinner nap, when, an hour later, they had returned to the drawing-room, and had been sitting some time silent in the twilight. The elder lady was reclining in her favorite low chair near the window, and Jean sat with down-cast eyes, and hands folded in her lap on a couch behind her.

"I will try," murmured the girl, rising from her seat. She stood a few moments nervously clasping and unclasping her

hands, then, tossing them above her head, sunk back on to the couch again, burying her face in the pillows in mute agony. Did a faint sigh reach her, or was it the subtle divination of his presence? She sat up, peered into the shadowy part of the room, then tremblingly rose. Should she add to his pain? Ah, no, not for a thousand worlds! Slowly she made her way to the piano, sat down, and played a few simple school airs. She dared not trust herself to let her thoughts flow into melody, though she longed to comfort him, her tender woman's heart yearning to add his share of suffering to her own.

"That little Scotch air is very pretty," said the little lady, between her naps.

"You are improving, I think, Jean."

Poor Jean! It was as though she were complimented upon being paralyzed. But she strove on, plodding mechanically through the learner's first book, which she had been accustomed to teach the younger girls at Ivy Lodge, until tea and candles were brought in.

"Mr. Orme was taking his coffee in the library, and begged that the ladies would excuse him not joining them," was the message given to Miss Orme.

"Has your master dined out, Robert?"

"I believe so, ma'am. He has not long returned, and only ordered coffee."

"I will speak to him," said Miss Orme, trotting importantly off on her errand.

In a few minutes she returned with a satisfied face. "Dear Nugent is very well, he says, only a little tired; so we must excuse him to-night. I have been telling him he is getting a little impatient at the length of the separation from dear Maud, although I could not blame him for it. Of course you know that she is going to be his wife, my dear."

"Yes, I know," with a half-strangled sob at the thought of what the knowledge had cost her. How she longed to make her escape! how interminable to-night seemed the hour devoted to knitting and conversation between tea and prayers! At half-past ten the servants filed into the room, and Miss Orme went enjoyably through the customary prayers and chapter and little homily; gently impressing upon her hearers the sin of coveting the good things of this transitory life, and their bounden duty to be content with that state of life they had been called to walk in. Then, gazing benignly at them over her gold-rimmed spectacles, a bright example of content with things as they existed, she gave them the bow of dismissal with a quiet conscience.

Free at last, Jean hurried away to her room, locked and double-locked the door, flung herself on to the ground, and gave vent to her misery, suffering with all her young strength; but, though she knew it



not, suffering healthily. She had not learned the art of comforting herself by blaming others or railing at cruel fate. The sorrow had come, and it had to be borne. She bore it like a child—with the wild, childish hope that the agony would kill her. Surely it would not be possible to go on living like this very long! She did not know her capacity for endurance, or imagine how far it had yet to be tested.

When at length she sunk faint and exhausted on her pillow, she almost fancied that her prayers for those she loved might be her last. Poor Jean, she awoke refreshed by her long sleep, and even hungry, her misery notwithstanding.

How could she meet him? She recollected having once told him that she was glad he could so easily read her thoughts, because it spared her the trouble of telling them. "But if I could only hide them now!" she murmured, looking nervously at the tell-tale face in the glass—the white cheeks and heavy, dark-rimmed eyes, in which all the life and light seemed quenched. She rubbed her cheeks, trying to bring a little color into them. Should her white face blame him? Ah, no! He must never know how terrible the blow had been! She managed to enter the breakfast-room and get through the morning greetings with tolerable steadiness, placing her hand a moment in his as they met. But after one upward glance into his grave, set face, she did not venture to look toward him again. She had enough to do to keep up some semblance of self-control. He did his best to help her by drawing his aunt's attention to himself; asking questions about her schools and *protégées*, and appearing much interested in her elaborate explanations. "If only she does not notice the difference in his voice," thought Jean. "Ah, the terrible difference of these hard, even tones!" Fortunately, Miss Orme was very little observant of intonation, and was, besides, quite unaware of her nephew's capabilities in that way. She had never heard any thing like that.

"Jean! Jean!"

"Poor little Mary Butler has been obliged to remain at home to wait upon her invalid mother the last three weeks, and so lost her chance of the prize for regular attendance. Rather hard for her, isn't it, Nugent?"

"You must set matters straight by giving her a prize for what she has done out of school, Aunt Jemmy."

"But would that be quite right, Nugent, dear, unless— Well, I might make her a present for her kindness to her sick mother, perhaps."

"A capital idea."

At which the little lady perked herself up; as though she always kept a stock of capital ideas on hand, and the production of one was mere child's play.

When at length—Miss Orme rather delayed the process to enjoy the somewhat novel pleasure of a talk with her nephew—the meal had been got through, Jean rose from her seat with a half-smothered sigh of relief. She had reached the door when she recollected what had come to be her morning's custom, and looked toward the little side-table, upon which she had hitherto found a bouquet placed ready for her to carry to Maud. There were no flowers this morning. She stood a moment gazing at the vacant place, twining her hands tightly together, then turned toward him, and said, in a low but steady voice, "Will you give me the flowers for Maud, Mr. Orme?"

His hand tightened over the back of the chair it rested upon, and his eyes fell. Miss Orme made a little jest at his forgetfulness this last morning.

"I suppose you are waiting to give them yourself, Nugent. But I think you had better send them as usual, lest she should be prevented coming down. Dr. Travers said he thought she might venture; but it is better not to depend too much upon seeing her, in case he should advise another day's delay when he comes. And, in any case, she may expect her flowers, you know."

He murmured something about the "best being dead."

"Dead!" ejaculated Miss Orme. "My dear Nugent—in August! I never remember the beds looking so well."

"Please let me take them, Mr. Orme," said Jean; "I wish to, this morning."

He darted a half-reproachful, half-angry look toward her. "Was it so easy, then?"

But as his eyes dwelt for a moment upon the white face, and he noted the heavy dark-rimmed eyes, and the poor, quivering lips vainly striving to shape themselves into a smile, he understood, though the knowledge did but increase his misery and self-condemnation. Bowing his head, he silently went out by the window, which opened to the ground, to do her bidding.

Jean waited in fear and trembling, seized with a sudden terror lest Miss Orme should leave her before his return. In a hurried, nervous way she rushed into talk with the little lady apropos of any thing, and contrived to keep her employed in replying until Nugent Orme re-entered the room. She dared not venture again to look at him; but presently a few geranium blossoms and roses, loosely bound together, were put down on to the table before her, and, after a moment or two, a single white moss-rose bud was laid by their side. She took up the bouquet, and, after a short pause, the single flower, the color rushing into her cheeks.

In the fullness of her happiness (was she not to see him to-day?), Maud was a little critical over her flowers.

"Nugent certainly does not improve in

the art of arranging flowers!" she laughingly ejaculated. "The idea of geraniums and roses—red and pink—without a bit of contrast in the way of white or green. Ah, that's just what I want!" her eyes lighting upon the young girl's flower. "Give me your white bud, Jean?"

"It's my only one," pleaded Jean, hastily covering it with her hand. "Let me keep it—please, Maud?" with a little half-sob.

"Pray do not be sentimental about such a trifle," loftily replied Maud. "And do not be afraid; I am not going to take it from you by force. Bring me a spray of that fern."

Jean brought it to her, and then stood watching her with eager eyes, her hand pressed over her beating heart. Ah, if, after all, Maud should not care for him! But the faint hope soon died, as she noted how tenderly two or three blossoms were detached from the rest, arranged with a tiny piece of fern, lifted to the smiling lips, and then pinned in her dress. Maud had decided that nothing should prevent her going down to the drawing-room that day, and "dear Nugent" was, as she playfully informed him in her note, to have the honor to be present at the ceremony, and assist with his arm, if need were. Had he loved her, how highly would the privilege have been estimated! No prisoner could have dreaded the rack more than did Nugent Orme dread meeting Maud. Once, as he restlessly paced the library awaiting the summons, a hope sprung up within him that a change might possibly have taken place in her sentiments toward him. But the hope was dangerously exhilarating; one wild outburst of joy at the bare thought of being free showed him the danger of indulging in it. He dared not allow his thoughts to wander to her—noble, simple, beautiful Jean, who had given him a religion, in return for which he had cast a shadow upon her young life. He dared not even try to minister to the soul he had wounded almost unto death.

"Now, Nugent, dear, I hope you have not been very impatient, but we thought it best to wait until Dr. Travers had been," said Miss Orme, peeping smilingly into the room. He followed her upstairs to the door of the room, on the threshold of which stood Maud, looking the personification of happiness. One glance at her radiant face showed him that he had nothing to hope.

"At last!" she ejaculated, placing her hand in his, and looking up into his face, half courting a warmer greeting.

"I am very glad to see you looking so like yourself again," he said, stupidly, releasing her hand after only the slightest pressure, and offering his arm.

A slight shade of disappointment crossed her face. He was so very grave and quiet.

But she had made up her mind not to encourage doubt, and was not going to break faith with herself in the outset. She soon found an agreeable way of accounting for his silence. Dear Nugent, he was thinking what a long imprisonment it had been for her. "It has been rather a tedious affair, has it not?" she murmured, leaning a little more heavily than was absolutely necessary upon his arm.

"Very. I hardly expected to see you looking so—blooming."

She smiled. "Dear Nugent, he had never been very happy in making compliments, and he knew how little she cared to receive them." Yet she was conscious that she could have borne a little more in that way to-day—just this once. As they slowly made their way down toward the drawing-room, Maud Poynder shot one or two anxious, inquiring looks into her lover's face. How very silent he was! But she once more reminded herself that dear Nugent objected to much demonstration, and knew she did also. Presently they were alone together.

But when Miss Orme left them, which she very considerably did as soon as possible, after arranging some pillows on the couch and seeing Maud comfortably placed for a rest after the exertion, the latter did not find her companion grow more lover-like; indeed, he seemed quite at a loss for words. After a few awkward sentences, his eyes, avoiding hers, and searching for something to talk about, lighted upon a book she had been reading, and he hastily availed himself of the topic it suggested.

"Are you interested in this?" he asked, taking up the book and turning over a few pages. "Close reasoning, is it not?"

But she was not inclined to enter into a discussion of that kind after a separation of six weeks, and only replied to his attempts to draw her into one with monosyllables. The more he strove, eagerly catching at any thing that suggested itself apart from personal talk, the more reticent became she—wounded and indignant that the one topic of all-absorbing interest to her should be passed over. Yet he did not appear to have taken any offense, or to be angry about any thing. He was gentle almost to tenderness in his tone and bearing toward her (for indeed Nugent Orme was even more sorry for her than for himself), and yet both jarred upon her more than would have done positive anger.

How more than welcome to him was Mrs. Poynder's entrance, which gave him an opportunity to make his escape, and how eagerly he availed himself of it! With a murmured excuse about having letters to write, he left the mother and daughter together, and went to the library. Once there, he threw himself into a chair and sat staring blankly at the picture of his future life

as it presented itself to him, breaking into a short, bitter laugh at the recollection that it had once seemed all-sufficient for his need.

## CHAPTER XV.

### LOUIS POYNDRER'S FAILURE.

MAUD lay back among the cushions, rather paler than even her long confinement to the house seemed to warrant, her white brows a little puckered as she irritably replied to her mother's affectionate inquiries.

"Don't worry so, mamma! Pale, indeed! Did you expect to see me very red?"

"No, dear; oh no!" Then the anxious mother went on: "I'm afraid—I hope I did not come in at an inopportune moment, Maud?"

"How about uncle's letter?" ignoring her mother's questioning looks. "What does he say now?"

Mrs. Poynder had not a very cheerful account to give. Her brother had repeated his previous assertion respecting the disposal of his property in a very decided and business-like manner indeed. He was on the eve of sailing for England, and previously intended making his will, leaving every thing to Jean. "Less three hundred a year for myself as long as I live, dear. And he speaks of it as being a very large fortune!"

"You must be quite proud of having so generous a brother. Did you tell Louis what I advised you to tell him?"

"Yes, dear, and he begins himself to see the necessity for making things sure as soon as possible. He promised not to delay any longer, as I told him your uncle might be here in another week or two if he sailed when he intended to sail."

"We must get her a little finery, mamma. He may not approve of his heiress wearing those holland dresses, perhaps. At any rate, he will give us credit for good intention if she is well dressed. I wish I knew why he did not allow her to take his name, or acknowledge her all those years," musingly went on Maud. "It is evident enough that she herself has not the least suspicion what the cause of his long neglect of her was; but there must have been a cause, and a very grave one. You have not told me your news, Jean," she presently said, when her cousin came hesitatingly into the room, dreading to enter, yet afraid to absent herself.

"News?" shrinking back, with frightened eyes.

"Your letter, foolish child! Mamma tells me that Uncle Oliver is on his way home. Indeed, I suppose we may expect him almost any day now."

"Yes," nervously twisting the ribbon of

her hat, which was swinging from her arm in Jean fashion.

"Quite a long letter, I suppose?"

"N-o; not very."

"For private reading only?" asked Maud, a little surprised at Jean not at once giving her the letter to read, as she had always hitherto done.

"Oh no, there is nothing private," said Jean, with a little guilty blush, taking the letter from the bosom of her dress and offering it to Maud. "Will you read it?"

"Oh yes, if you wish it," returned Maud, laughingly, extending her hand; in truth, a little curious to see whether there was any real cause for the girl's hesitation. "You have dropped something, Jean."

Jean hastily picked up the withered rose, and replaced it in its hiding-place.

"Really, Uncle Oliver seems very much afraid of your losing your heart, Miss Jean!" presently ejaculated Maud. "But it's a little too late for advice, is it not? Nonsense, child! there is nothing to be ashamed of." Then, as, with a little sob, Jean hurried from the room, she added, "What a baby she is! However, that sort of thing will just suit Lot's. He will like all the world to see how much he is adored."

The luncheon party was a very dull one; each was making an effort to be specially agreeable, and each was conscious of the effort in the others. It was the same at dinner; only a little more dreary from lasting longer. Altogether Maud was forced to acknowledge to herself, when once more alone in her room, that the day had not been so satisfactory as she had anticipated it being. But she resolutely put from her all doubt and uneasiness, promising herself a brighter morrow. Of course, it was all certain enough: what was there to prevent it? She had been a little too *exigeante* in her expectations, that was all. But the morrow brought no change for the better. A heavy cloud seemed to be settling down upon them, appearing all the more dark and threatening to such of them as could not trace its cause. How glad would have been three out of the party to satisfy themselves in Miss Orme's easy fashion. The depression, or whatever it was, had communicated itself to her, and she attributed it, as she attributed most uncomfortable things, to the weather. But her prediction that a storm must be at hand did not comfort the others as it comforted herself. The little lady had no experience of other than atmospheric disturbances.

It appeared quite a relief to them all when Mrs. Poynder and her son came in while they were at dessert. Unconsciously, they had sat longer than usual, in their endeavors to keep up appearances with each other. Whatever others might feel, there was no depression about Louis Poynder, and he did them

all good service with his lively sallies. He had arrived at the conclusion that his cousin Jean was not altogether so ineligible herself, and with a large fortune extremely eligible; so he had come prepared to sign and seal that evening, and set the child's mind at rest. "Poor little girl, I do believe she is beginning to fret!" he thought, taking note of her spiritless attempts to appear as usual.

He was, therefore, as willing to join the ladies as Nugent Orme desired him to be, after they had passed half an hour almost silently over their wine, making a jesting allusion to his having got to go through a bit of sentiment presently, out there under the trees.

Nugent Orme made no reply, accompanying the other to the drawing-room with lagging steps and downcast eyes. Miss Orme, Mrs. Poynder, and Maud were resting—the two former really, and the latter trying to appear to do so—in after-dinner fashion. Jean, restless, nerveless, miserable Jean (finding her burden so much harder to bear than it had been in the first excitement of accepting it, and blaming herself for finding it so difficult to do right), had made her escape, and was wandering under the trees, unconscious that her movements could be traced by the gleam of her white dress.

She had even spared him the trouble of asking her to go out! thought Louis, caressing his mustache as he languidly made his way across the room toward the open window, stopping to examine the Swiss carving of a paper-knife and turn over a few leaves of a book on his way.

Nugent Orme, called to Maud's side by the couch, and playfully complimented upon not giving way to after-dinner habits, stood watching Louis with envious, miserable eyes. Had he been free to go to her!

"Well, Jean, is this romantic enough for you?"

"Louis!" she exclaimed, turning nervously toward him. "Is it tea-time?"

"No, I should think not—for another hour. Here, where are you going? Don't be rushing away, child!"

"I—I am tired. I want to go in."

"Nonsense! Why are you so shy with me lately—eh, Jean?" catching her hands in his own, and laughing at her efforts to free them. "Shall I guess why?"

"There is nothing to guess, Louis. Pray let me go!" Then she recollected what Nugent Orme told her about people fancying that she loved her cousin. He must not think so; there must be no further miserable complications. She turned toward him, and said, quietly and gravely,

"I am getting older now, you know, Louis, and ought not to be so foolish as I used to be. People might think I cared for you in a different way."

"A different way to what?" he added, laughingly. "Don't try to flirt, Jean, it does not suit your style."

"Leave go of my hand, if you please, Louis."

He laughed a little louder, and, putting his disengaged arm round her, stooped and lightly kissed her brow.

She burst from his detaining arm, sweeping her hand across her brow with an angry gesture, as though to efface any trace of the contact of his lips.

"How dare you! I—I thought you liked me, Louis."

"So I do."

"No, no, no! Not even as a cousin!"

"What do you mean by not even as a cousin?"

"It was not like a gentleman to behave in that way."

"What a child you are! Nonsense, Jean! Why, what's come to you?" he said, getting a little out of patience, as he noted how distant she kept from him. "Where's the harm of a kiss between two who love each other?"

"But we do not love each other, any more than as cousins." At last she comprehended how very slight the kind of love which has only a cousinly relationship to sustain it may be.

He darted an angry look at her. What had come to the girl? But he remembered the stakes, managed to keep down the angry words which rose to his lips, and changed his tactics, putting on a depressed, injured air. "Come, Jean; be a little reasonable, darling. I know you do not mean to be unkind, and it would be deucedly unkind to flirt and pretend to turn the cold shoulder upon me now, after leading me on so long. I love you, and have always believed you returned my love—every body believed it."

Was it true? Had she unknowingly done him so much wrong? Had he and others misunderstood her so much as to think she cared for him? She fastened her grave eyes upon his, which shifted and fell beneath her gaze, and, with a little sigh of relief, returned:

"If people thought so, they were very foolish as well as wrong; *you*" (there was a slight emphasis upon the last word) "know they were wrong, Louis. I have never loved you, and you have never loved me, in any other way than as a cousin."

"If you mean to play me false, do not think to fall back upon that as an excuse!" he exclaimed, roughly. "I say I love you, and you have given me every reason to believe that you returned my love."

Once more her eyes searched his. "Then I know you better than you know yourself, Louis. You do not care for me, in the way that lovers care" (ah! did she not know what real love was too well to be deceived by this weak imitation?), "and I am very glad, for it is the same with me."

"I say you have led me on, and I love you," he repeated, doggedly.

"No," firmly.

It was his turn to cast an inquiring look at her. Had some hint about little Jessie reached her? "You are keeping something back—what is it?"

"Keeping back!" she echoed, shrinking farther away; the tell-tale color flaming in her cheeks.

"Yes; I see you are. But if you have been told any thing about—about my having flirted a little with another, you ought not to condemn me without giving me an opportunity to explain. A man may have a passing jest with a pretty girl now and then, without being untrue to the one he loves. It would have been different if our engagement had been settled, and I dare say it's been terribly exaggerated to you."

"Oh no, I assure you!" she replied, greatly relieved. "I have not heard any thing. I know no one who would say a word against you, if I would listen!"

Something else was beginning to dawn upon him. While he had slept at his post, another had crept into the fortress and secured the position. It was bad enough to find her indifferent to himself; but a thousand times worse to suspect that she loved another.

"You have been playing a double game!" he ejaculated, almost beside himself with rage and mortification. "But you shall never marry another. I swear it!"

"You need not. I shall never marry." And without another word she darted away, and was out of sight before he could prevent her.

He stood anathematizing his wretched fate which made this girl's money necessary to him; anathematizing her, himself, the bole of the tree he stumbled against, the dewy grass, the silver moonlight, and every other thing that came within his range, and then turned sullenly toward the house again.

"Get your bonnet on, if I'm to see you home," was his speech to his mother, as he re-entered by the drawing-room window.

"My dear Louis! What—?" Mrs. Poynder looked up into his face, and left the rest unfinished; rising meekly to obey him.

"Not without tea," protested Miss Orme, in much astonishment. "I could not let you go yet, really. My dear Louis, there is no necessity to hurry your mother away like this."

"I don't want her to come if she prefers staying, Miss Orme; but I'm due in the town at nine," he said, feeling that his *brusquerie* needed some sort of apology. "So I shall be glad if you will send some one with my mother."

"Of course, my dear Louis, of course," said the little lady.

"Oh no," hurriedly put in Mrs. Poynder.

"If you will excuse me, I will put on my bonnet at once, Jemima." And, notwithstanding Miss Orme's protestations, she went out of the room. What in the world had happened to make dear Louis look like that?

"Louis," said Maud, taking a note from her pocket and beckoning her brother toward her, "will you leave this order at the bookseller's for me?" Then, as he came to her side, "What is it?" she whispered; "any thing wrong?"

"Every thing's wrong."

"She has not refused you!" she ejaculated, sinking back among her pillows, and looking at him in dismay. "Oh, Louis, is it possible?" Then she bent eagerly forward again, and whispered, "You have made some stupid mistake—didn't seem earnest enough, or perhaps took her love too much for granted. A romantic girl like Jean expects lots of courting nonsense, you know."

"She won't get any more than she has had from me!" he replied, roughly. Even to his sister, he did not choose to allow that his courting would be unacceptable. For the moment he was even more angry at the idea of Jean not loving him than at the loss of the money. To be refused by a chit like that—refused! When any other girl—little Jessie, for instance—was ready to fall down and worship him. Confound her, if she supposed he was going to break his heart about her—he would soon let her see!

When Mrs. Poynder came down shawled and bonneted for the drive home, she was unceremoniously hurried off without being allowed much time for leave-takings.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE WOOING O'T.

"I AM afraid there has been some little tiff between Jean and Louis," said Miss Orme, when he had carried off his mother, and she was alone with Maud. It was the same as being alone, Nugent Orme having taken his book toward one of the windows to use up the fast-fading light, and appearing completely absorbed in the subject treated upon.

"Jean is always a little uncertain in her moods," sweetly replied Maud, turning her eyes upon Nugent's downcast face, wishing she could read his thoughts, almost sure that they were not at that moment with the author he was reading. But had his mental ejaculation, "Blind, blind, blind!" been uttered aloud, would she have perceived its application?

"But it is very wrong to play with dear Louis's feelings, my dear."

"It is very wrong to play with *any one's* feelings, dear Miss Orme." Then, seeing that

Nugent Orme's attention was now openly given to what was said, poor Maud played her last card. "Things may perhaps go on a little more smoothly when I return to Fernside. I was telling mamma just now that it was quite time for me to relieve you of—"

"My dear Maud!" began the little lady, quite distressed.

"No; I ought not to have said that, dear; I well know that it costs you no effort to do a kindness. Nor do I mean to try to thank you for all your goodness to me in words. Such a dear good friend should be thanked in kind, and I will try to repay your love with love. But I think they are wanting me at home just now, and I should like to be there when Uncle Oliver returns, which he may do any day now; so I must try to make up my mind to say good-bye to the dear old Grange. Fortunately we are not very far from you at Fernside."

"Well, my dear, I suppose I must not urge your stay too much. But I shall miss you dreadfully." With a glance toward her nephew, she added, affectionately, "But I hope it will not be for long." Then, with a confidential little nod, she discovered that she required some fresh wool for her knitting, and trotted off to seek it, consulting her watch, and allowing the half-hour preceding tea for her errand.

"Nugent, have I offended you in any way?"

It had come! He placed the book which he held on a table by his side, but he did not, as she hoped and expected he would, move toward her. Moreover, she could see that his face grew grayer than the pale, fast-fading light seemed to warrant; while something very like a spasm of pain contracted his brow. Then he spoke in a low, grave, kindly voice: "I do not think you could offend me if you were to try, Maud!"

"Then why—oh, Nugent, what has come between us?" she said, rising and going toward him. "What has made you so different of late? Can not you see how miserable it makes me to find you so changed. Are you really changed?"

She found her answer in his face, and shrunk back with an involuntary cry of pain. What would he not have given to spare her? Had he not tried hard to do so? His heart bled for her, but he knew now how hopeless it was to try to deceive her. It was absolutely impossible to assume the bearing of a lover to another, after that interview with Jean. Possibly in time he might be able to put on some semblance of the real thing; but not yet—not now—with Jean's first and last kiss fresh upon his soul. Perhaps the best proof of the quality of his love for Jean was his deep pity for the other, and his anxiety to spare her as much as possible.

"I can not defend myself, Maud."

"Have you deceived me—is it possible that you have been all these years trying to win my love without feeling any toward me? Oh, Nugent, I *can not* believe it; you can not be so—so—"

"No, I am not so bad as that, Maud. I loved you" (how terribly her heart sunk at the past tense!), "and I know that if my love were returned you have every right to consider yourself my affianced wife. And yet I have been untrue to you." Even as he uttered the words, the corollary, "in being true to the truth," ran through his thoughts. Sorry as he was for her, it would never be possible to allow that his love for Jean was less than a love for all that was best and truest. He had not even realized the full meaning of the words before he knew her, and she had brought to the surface a chivalry and romance that had before been only latent in his nature.

"You love some one else!" faltered Maud, "and are seeking an excuse for acting dishonorably to me."

"I tried—I hoped—to prevent your seeing that there was any difference. But had I been successful, it would have been acting unjustly toward you. You have a right to know the truth, and at the same time know that I desire to act honorably—so far as I can do that now."

"Only honorably!" she murmured. "Oh, Nugent! what a word from you to me!"

"God knows it, I would spare you if I could, Maud. I know you have just cause for indignation, and you can not blame me more than I blame myself—on your account. But," he went on, taking her hand, and with one last effort bidding good-bye to hope (he saw she was content to take the little he had to offer), "you know what meaning I attach to the word, and if you will accept it I will devote my life to your happiness; so far as in me lies, I will make you happy."

"Her happiness"—no word of his own. Where was her pride—where her vaunted strength and self-respect to accept such love-making as this? Wondering at herself, she stooped and kissed his hand, accepting the sacrifice. She saw with terrible distinctness that it was a sacrifice, and one that she was incapable of making herself, and yet she accepted it.

He could not prevent his thoughts reverting a moment to that other love scene; when Jean, knowing herself beloved—knowing she held both his and her own future in her hands—feeling no shame of her love, even proudly acknowledging it, had, without one moment's hesitation, chosen the narrow road. But he wrenched himself away from the remembrance, and sealed his compact with one kiss upon the cheek suggestively presented to him.

"And now let us bury the subject of being untrue, and all that sort of thing, forever

between us, Nugent. I mean to forget it altogether, as only some passing fancy—some infatuation which could only momentarily place a barrier between us. I can not believe that another could make you really cease to care for me.” For her suspicions were still wide enough from the truth. She had put a certain construction upon his self-condemnation, and Maud Poynder was too well aware of the temptations besetting rich single men to judge him very harshly for having a while succumbed to them. Arbitrating upon certain disgraceful episodes in her brother’s career would have a little blunted her feelings in such matters, had they ever been of the finest. Poor Nugent had evidently become entangled with some one like that dreadful girl who had given them so much trouble with her threats about Louis. Then Nugent was so different from Louis! Dear Nugent, he was such a hard judge of himself, and would not be satisfied with making it a money question.

He was looking down at her with a grave smile. Well, it was better, perhaps, that she should believe it had been only some passing fancy, since she was going to marry him. And he was glad to think how little would satisfy her in the way of love-making, although it caused him once more to break down as he reflected how much more *exigente* Jean would have been. But he mastered himself, and turned toward Maud again.

“Then it is settled between us, Maud?”

She smiled up into his face, and replied, lightly, “And I mean to be very good, Nugent. I will not ask one question about the woman who has done me so much wrong.”

“Wrong!” he exclaimed, looking at her with astonished eyes, far enough from understanding the conclusion she had drawn, and with a vivid remembrance that Jean’s first thought had been justice to her cousin.

“Well, she may not have had any personal ill-will; but she nevertheless did me wrong when she made you truant to your better self. I am not afraid of entering the lists against a bad woman, Nugent.”

“Bad?” he echoed; “bad!” But he recollected that she did not know of whom she was speaking, and kept back the words that sprang to his lips. “Do you think I could insult you, Maud? Do you believe that I could imagine myself in love with a bad woman?”

“No, no. We will say no more about it.” She had not meant to imply that he could love a bad woman. It had been an infatuation, of course.

He glanced at her in a moment’s doubt. Should he be more explicit? No; for Jean’s sake it was as well to let her rest in the error she had fallen into. That she could fall into it not a little astonished him. He

knew now what it was she believed, and her easy way of accepting such an explanation of the change which had taken place in his bearing toward her was a revelation to him. Simply replying that she was right in her decision to say no more about the subject, he nerved himself to the task, and went on with something else which he felt was expected, and must be said.

“How long does it take a lady to prepare for a wedding, Maud? You know I always have to depend upon you about the proprieties,” he said, with a little attempt at a jest. “You will have to coach me up to the standard of respectability in matters matrimonial.” Then he watched eagerly for her reply.

Pleased at what she imagined to be a little more lover-like than any thing he had yet said, and far enough from guessing the cause, she said, with a soft, happy little laugh, “I shall not ask you to wait longer than three months after the engagement is made known, sir.”

Three months! So soon as that! But he presently replied in a low voice, “Then I must ask you to give me leave of absence for a couple of months or so, Maud. I suppose you will be taken possession of by the milliners and people, and—I am afraid—I think I require a little change—of scene.”

“Two months!” she ejaculated. “Change of scene!”

“Will you trust me, Maud?”

Maud Poynder was the sensible woman she considered herself to be, certainly upon some points. In the first place, she knew that his word was his bond, and in the next she was keen enough to see that this was not a time for stipulations; so she wisely made none. She laid her cheek against his shoulder, and, with a tender upward look into his face, whispered, “I will trust you entirely, Nugent.”

He kissed her brow, but she had again, so to speak, to suggest it to him by slightly raising her face to his. Presently she went on: “Where do you think of going, Nugent?”

“My movements will, I dare say, be rather erratic; but I shall be able to give you some definite idea before I go.”

“And you will write frequently?”

“Oh yes—yes, of course.”

How welcome to one of them was Miss Orme’s entrance at that moment, considerably giving a little warning cough as she advanced into the room, and announced tea, “if any one there cared for so prosaic an entertainment.”

“Tell her, please,” whispered Maud, alive to the wisdom of the old proverb against delay.

He led her toward Miss Orme. “Will you congratulate me, Aunt Jenima?”

“My dear boy, heartily! You know how long this has been the wish of my heart.”

Maud, dear, may you be as happy as you deserve to be." Then she presently went on to hope that the marriage would not be long delayed. "There is not the least necessity for delay, you know, my dears. Every body has looked upon you as engaged for years. Three months! Now, that is really sensible. Dear me, how busy we all shall be! If the Grange is to be redecorated and refurnished, as you always said it should be, no time must be lost, Nugent. Your hands will be quite as full as ours."

"A few hours will suffice to explain my plans about the house to the builder, Aunt Jemima, and the furnishing I shall leave entirely to Maud's taste, so that the library remains undisturbed."

Miss Orme explained to Maud that it had always been understood between dear Nugent and her that she was to select what she chose from the dear old belongings to furnish her own suite of rooms. Mand agreed in the most delightful manner. As if it mattered to her what became of the old rubbish when she had a *carte-blanche* to replace it with furniture after her own taste. The idea of the separate suite of rooms was especially agreeable to her.

"Tell one of the maids to let Miss Raymond know that tea is brought in, Robert," said Miss Orme.

In a few minutes Jean entered the room, slowly and reluctantly, some traces of what the effort had cost her in her white face. It was some little relief to find that her aunt and Louis had taken their departure. He had been so terribly hard and bitter, and it had come upon her when she was still weak and unnerved.

Maud was rather surprised at her lover's sudden flow of speech after Jean's entrance. All sorts of things seemed suddenly to occur to him which ought to be told to his aunt. Little happenings in the village, a long talk he had had with Dr. Brayleigh about church dilapidations, his serious doubts about the safety of the belfry, and so forth—all was reported circumstantially enough, even for Miss Orme, whose attention was effectually engaged. But he only succeeded in gaining a little time for Jean. He could not prevent his aunt from taking note of the evidence of suffering in the young face when at length she turned her eyes upon Jean.

"My dear child! Why, what in the world?" She remembered Louis's abrupt departure, and her own suspicion at the moment that there must have been some love quarrel, and went on with a wise little nod, "If you would like to send a note to Fernside to-night, one of the men shall take it, my dear Jean. I think you would sleep all the better for having sent it, would you not?"

"A note?" said Jean, looking inquiringly up from a piece of work she was trying to

appear occupied with. "No, thank you, Miss Orme; I have nothing to write about, and I dare say Aunt Maria will be here in the morning."

Miss Orme gravely shook her head. A sad thing to be obstinate! The girl was so evidently punishing herself, too. "But suppose you might give some one else a better night, Jean?"

Jean made no reply, bending her face a little lower over her work. But something—she knew not what—in the girl touched Miss Orme's heart, as she went on cheerfully: "Well, well, the longest night comes to an end, and you must not look so doleful, my dear, with a wedding so close at hand. Has Maud told you that she has consented to be Nugent's wife in three months?"

"No," whispered Jean.

"Do you not congratulate us, my dear?"

The color rushed into Jean's face, then faded almost as quickly, leaving her paler than before. But this once, she prayed—strength for this once; if she could only get through this, the rest would be easy.

"Well, Jean, can't you find one word?" said Maud, slipping her hand under Nugent Orme's arm, and turning smilingly toward her.

"Miss Raymond thinks congratulations are very absurd, and she is quite right," said Nugent Orme, with a very decided movement, taking Maud's hand from his arm, and turning to leave the room.

"No, Mr. Orme, no; I do not think so," exclaimed Jean, in a high, pained voice, rising from her seat, and going toward her cousin.

He paused on his way out, the sternness about his mouth and eyes giving way to another expression. Annoyed at his cavalier manner of removing her hand, and more than annoyed at his words, Maud remained proudly silent, while Jean stood with clasped hands and bowed head a few moments before her.

One guessed how those few moments were spent, while he stood apart powerless to help her. Then, out of patience, Maud said, angrily, "Pray do not be sentimental about it, Jean. I assure you I care quite as little about congratulations as Mr. Orme does."

"But I want to say something, if I can only say it kind enough, Cousin Mand. I am glad you are going to be happy; please believe it," her eyes beseeching him to believe her.

He flung aside the muslin curtain, to his aunt's consternation, tearing it from beneath his feet with what sounded very much like a muttered oath, and strode from the window into the open air.

Fortunately Maud found a reason for it all very satisfactory to herself. Dear Nugent, he had always objected to Jean's school-girl demonstrations, and this was more than he had the patience to bear.



"Mr. Orme does not appreciate exhibitions of sentiment, you see, Jean," she said, smilingly. Then, arranging a light shawl becomingly over her shoulders, she went out to join her lover in the peaceful moonlight.

"You are a little too severe upon poor Jean, Nugent," she said, when she came upon him chafing up and down under the trees; "I think the poor child means well, though I do not admire her rhapsodical manner any more than you do yourself."

He turned his dim eyes upon her. Would she feel it very much? Surely not a thousandth part of the suffering Jean was passing through! But, then, Jean was a thousand times more capable of bearing it. He knew now where the strength of each lay, and in what it consisted.

Poor Maud found him very *distracted*, and unready to make the most of the occasion in lover fashion. Not even being sorry for her could make him attempt to seem lover-like now. How different this from the delightful communing she had dreamed of between them! Ah! how she was beginning to hate the woman who had come between them, and caused all this difference! If by any chance they ever met—she as the wife, and the other as the cast-off!

After two or three failures in her attempts to draw him into something like conversation, she recollected how few were able, like herself, to meet him upon intellectual ground. Had he not frequently told her that he had never met a woman so well able to cope with a logical difficulty? So she led up to one of their favorite topics of conversation—a new school of philosophy just coming into notice. But even here she failed to impress him now; and though he strove to prevent her seeing that she failed, she did see it. The doubts which had merely passed through his mind had remained in hers, finding more natural affinity there, and the skepticism which he had once shared with her jarred upon him now. When she quoted an idea as "good enough for Dr. Brayleigh," going on to laugh at the old man's credulous weakness, Nugent Orme gravely said,

"He's such a good old fellow, Maud—an instance of the advantage of having a belief in something."

"The wrong thing?"

"Well, I'm almost prepared to go that length. A mistaken belief may be better than none at all, though his can not be called that."

"Have you been reading some credulous author lately?" a little satirically.

"No; I have gathered that much from the incredulous ones."

"And are you going to number yourself among Dr. Brayleigh's admirers?"

"I have always been one of his admirers, you know."

"But you did not always admire his views."

"They might be a little broader."

How different he seemed—how terribly changed from his old self! Worse than all, how ready he was to avail himself of her piqued request to return to the house!

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE LAST STRAW.

THE next morning Maud began to remember her brother's affairs. She had seen deeper than he supposed, and knew that it was something more than a mere love quarrel between Jean and him. His vanity had evidently received a wound. If Jean was in love with him at all, she was not so much so as they had all imagined her to be. But it would never do to let the money slip through their fingers without making some effort to prevent it, and Maud considered herself quite able to cope with a girl like Jean. "I must take the matter in hand for him," she thought. "He has not studied her character sufficiently, and, I expect, has taken things too much for granted." Not the faintest suspicion of the truth crossed her mind. Her conviction that Nugent Orme had been drawn into some disgraceful connection, and that he still held his first opinion about Jean, effectually blinded her. Giving Miss Orme a hint to leave them alone together, she commenced with a little graceful speech about being so sorry to see her "dear Jean" looking so pale and out of spirits.

"You must try and do us more credit before Uncle Oliver returns, you know, Jean, or he will think all sorts of things—that we have not treated you well, and I don't know what. You were looking so bonny only a few days ago."

Jean averted her face, and murmured something about the heat. The other took note of her fluttering color, and the heavy shade about the downcast eyes, then went on gently: "Louis, too, is looking very dejected, and unlike himself. If there has been any little tiff between you, you must allow a little for his love's sake, Jean. He was evidently suffering very much last night. Love quarrels become serious when they are taken seriously. Louis is so earnest and sensitive, too. I never saw a more devoted lover."

"Oh! do not call him that, Maud."

"Nonsense, child! As if every one had not seen! You can't make love without being called lovers, you know."

"I never meant to make love to Louis, and I do not think he ever cared to make love to me—in that way, Maud. I'm very sorry people thought so."

"Come, Jean, be reasonable! If he has offended you—the best of good people make mistakes sometimes—I will help to scold him; but there need be no concealment between you and me. Of course I know you love Louis."

"No, Maud; no one can know that, for it is not true. I do not love him more than as a cousin, and I never shall!"

"You can not be in earnest, Jean. You would not be so cruel as to destroy his happiness for a whim."

Jean turned her eyes calmly upon Maud; the sorrow in her face did not arise from any anxiety of that kind. "His happiness will not be destroyed. I am glad to know that Louis cares no more about me in that way than I do about him."

Maud stared at the girl facing her with such calm eyes, so self-possessed, quiet, and decided. Was it possible that this kind of material had been latent in the Jean of yesterday? Then she recollected certain signs and symptoms unmistakable to woman's eyes, and said, with a cold, scrutinizing look, "It is a question for your own conscience as to how much encouragement you have given to Louis, of course, Jean. But you certainly gave me the impression that your sentiments were warmer than cousinly toward him; there have been all sorts of evidence of your being in love, as it is called."

Here was the old Jean again. Shrinking as under a blow, a terrified, guilty expression in her face, and with her hand pressed over her heart as though to keep her secret from escaping, she hurriedly said something about hearing her aunt's voice, and ran from the room.

"She does love him, and I shall get it out of her next time!" complacently thought Maud, as she prepared to descend to the drawing-room. She found her mother, Miss Orme, and Nugent gathered together near one of the windows in grave consultation; the expression of their eyes as they turned toward her told that the subject they were considering was a very solemn one.

"Oh, Maud!" ejaculated Mrs. Poynder, turning toward her with red-rimmed eyes.

"Something distressing, I see, mamma. What has happened? Do not keep me in suspense—Louis?"

"No; your uncle."

"Arrived—ill?"

"Dead!" hysterically replied Mrs. Poynder. "The news arrived this morning."

It had been only a few lines from her brother's solicitor, just to convey the intelligence, giving a promise of further particulars by next mail; leaving Mrs. Poynder and her son in the deepest anxiety to know what those particulars were. Had Oliver Raymond executed the will as he intended, or not? Poor Mrs. Poynder was unpleasantly conscious that there was a great deal of

anxiety respecting the disposal of his property mixed up with the grief at the loss of her brother.

"Be very careful how you tell her," said Nugent Orme, thinking only of her, upon whom this new blow would fall with such terrible force, utterly alone as she was, and out of reach of such sympathy as they would have to give. "Be careful," he repeated, in a low, warning voice, as Jean at that moment entered the room.

Glancing toward them as she slowly advanced into the room, her eyes fell upon the letter in her aunt's hand, then opened wide with hope as she sprang eagerly forward.

"An Indian letter—news, Aunt Maria? Oh, tell me quick!"

"My dear Jean."

"Isn't he coming so soon—what is it, Aunt Maria?"

"My dear child, try to—to be calm."

"Calm!" echoed Jean, her eyes wandering nervously toward the letter again.

"My dear child," again began Mrs. Poynder, with an appealing glance toward the others for the help which they could not give, and seeking in her mind for words to convey the truth gently. "Try to bear it with Christian—"

"Try to bear what?" exclaimed Jean, in a high, frightened tone. Then she went on pleadingly, "I have borne a great deal lately, and I don't think I am strong enough to bear much more. But if papa is ill—if that is what I've got to bear, I must be brave, mustn't I? Papa is ill, is he not, Aunt Maria?"

Mrs. Poynder was silent, and with a last effort to ward off the blow, Jean went on, with a pathetic attempt at a smile: "Do not be afraid of telling me; it was all nonsense about not being able to bear. I am a very strong girl, really, you know. Oh, tell me he is ill, somebody tell me he is only ill!" turning her eyes entreatingly upon their grave faces. Then, with a little, hopeless cry, she lay at their feet, mercifully bereft for a time of the consciousness of her misery.

Putting their ready hands aside, as if their touch were sacrilege, Nugent Orme knelt down, and tenderly lifted her in his arms.

"Here, Nugent—on this couch."

Gently he laid her where they bade him, and they summoned aid.

Nugent Orme stood looking down at the white face so terribly pathetic in its still despair. If he heard the hints that his services could now be dispensed with, they were quite unheeded. He watched them tending her with something of the same sensations which the bereaved experience at the sight of irreverent hands performing the last offices for their dead, impatiently, shrinkingly, enviously.

But when Maud opened a scrap of paper which fell from the girl's dress, as they loos-

ened it at the throat, and with the words, "Only a dead flower," threw it aside, he lost all self-control. Roughly thrusting them aside, he knelt down by the unconscious girl, took the passive hand, and bowed his face upon it. It would have been all the same now had the room been crowded with gazers. In his awe of the terrible stillness which seemed to him so much like death, and utter forgetfulness of every thing but the misery of seeing her thus, he ejaculated, "God help you, my darling!"

Miss Orme sunk on to the nearest seat, with a cry of dismay. Maud caught her mother's hand, extended to touch his shoulder.

"He thinks it is you, dear; he must think it is you," said Mrs. Poynder, in a frightened undertone.

But Maud knew. The sudden hardening of her face, the cold, stony expression of the eyes, told that she knew; although she had the self-command to keep her mother back and remain quiet. She even waved the servants aside. There must be no interruption now—the scene must be played out.

"Jean! Jean!"

Her eyelids fluttered, opened, closed, opened again, and the brown eyes dwelt upon his face, their terror softening into a loving smile. She was as yet only just able to grasp the fact that it was he, and that he loved her. But presently her eyes shadowed again. Was this the blessed reality, or was it only a dream, and something else—something terrible—the reality? The truant senses came struggling back to their work, and the light went out of her eyes again.

Nugent Orme stumbled to his feet, and went out of the room.

"Oh, my dear Maud! My poor, ill-used Maud!" ejaculated Miss Orme, wringing her hands.

Mrs. Poynder sunk, sobbing, into a chair. "Such cruel, cruel treachery toward my poor child!"

"One's foes are to be of one's own household, you know," coldly said Maud.

"Shame!" whispered the servants, casting vindictive glances toward Jean. They had always looked upon Maud Poynder as their future mistress, and she was a great favorite with them. Only that morning they had been informed by Miss Orme of the approaching marriage. With one exception, every woman present laid all the blame upon Jean. The master hadn't been to blame, of course. She was an artful, designing minx, and had led him aside by her treacherous ways. He was a great deal more to be pitied than blamed.

"But, perhaps, she couldn't help it; he might have fallen in love with her without her knowing it," ventured a pretty housemaid, who had herself suffered from having innocently occasioned complications between the kitchen-maid and her lover.

"Couldn't help it!" with scornful emphasis, to which poor Hester succumbed.

Too much absorbed in her grief to hear, or, if she had heard, pay the slightest heed to their comments, Jean lay with closed eyes, white and still upon the couch as they had placed her.

Maud dismissed the servants, and then turned toward Miss Orme.

"You will let us have the carriage, and get away as quickly as possible, dear Miss Orme?"

"If you wish it, certainly, my dear Maud. Do whatever you think right and best," replied the little lady, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I dare not beg you to remain, after receiving such—such dreadful treatment! I can only pray that he may soon be brought to see his error, although I am sure you can see where the principal blame rests."

"Yes," Maud kissed the little lady's cheek; then went on to her mother: "Mamma, ask her if she does not think that she ought to make some effort to leave here, unless she wishes us to go without her."

"Yes, dear." The anxious mother beckoned Maud toward one of the windows, and added, entreatingly, "It is very terrible for you, I know, my dear child, my heart bleeds for you; but—oh, Maud! do not offend her. What are we to do—what will become of us if your uncle has left every thing to her?"

"Do not fear," returned Maud, her eyes dwelling for a moment upon Jean's face with a smile which almost caused her mother to utter an exclamation of affright.

And half an hour later the servants were deeply impressed by Maud Poynder's Christian forbearance, as she assisted them to place Jean comfortably in the carriage which was to convey them to Fernside.

"I couldn't never have done it!" ejaculated the kitchen-maid, clenching her hand, and giving a very expressive look toward pretty Hester. "I don't profess to be such a Christian saint as that!"

Could she have been able to read Maud's thoughts as she reclined by her cousin's side in the barouche, the kitchen-maid might have estimated her own capabilities rather higher.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WAITING.

ONCE in her own room at Fernside, Jean was left to bear her trouble as best she might. While the disposal of her father's property, and her future position with regard to them remained in uncertainty, they wished to avoid committing themselves to any future line of conduct toward her, had there been no graver cause for keeping apart from her. But Jean was only too glad to

be left to herself, and was, in a numb sort of way, grateful to them for not disturbing her with condolences. Spared the knowledge of the revelation which had been made, she attributed their leaving her so much alone entirely to their kindness. To remain still and undisturbed in her own room at Fernside was all she now desired, and that was granted to her. She was only disturbed by the servants bringing her food, and an occasional visit from her aunt, who stood by her side in a dreary state of uncertainty as to what she ought to do.

In spite of herself, Maria Poynder's heart went tenderly out toward the orphan girl, whom she could not even now quite dislike, although she knew that her daughter's future life was probably imbittered by her. Poor Mrs. Poynder! she meant to be loyal to her child, and yet she once or twice, as time went on, found herself giving utterance to a few kind words to the girl lying all day so still and hopeless-looking in a low chair by the window, her dim eyes seeing nothing of the scene they seemed to rest upon.

Once—only once, she ventured to plead a word with her daughter. But the sudden tightening of the beautiful mouth, and the hard glitter in the blue eyes, frightened Mrs. Poynder at her own daring.

"I—I only meant that there is just a possibility she did not know, Maud dear. Of course, if she knew he was growing attached to her, and gave him encouragement in any way, it was very, very wrong and cruel, and—"

"That will do, mamma. I am not complaining in any way, am I?"

"Oh no, my dear, no; but it goes to my heart to see you look so."

"You have told Louis, of course."

"Well, dear; he wanted to know, and—"

"You wanted to tell him."

"He was so surprised at the suddenness of our return, and he asked so many questions, and I thought you wouldn't mind. It will be sure to get about through the servants, you know. So very unfortunate their being present, wasn't it? Not that you need mind in one way. Every feeling heart will deeply sympathize with you."

Maud set her teeth at the bare thought of the Raystone sympathy.

"Dear Miss Orme, too, you will ever have a staunch friend in her. She feels how cruelly you have been wronged, and will take good care to do you the justice to inform every one of the exact truth. Will not you see her next time she comes, Maud dear? She was here twice yesterday, and you know how fond she is of you."

"I prefer being without her fondness. If she had not been as conceited as she is silly, she would have found out how much she bored me long ago."

Poor Mrs. Poynder burst into tears. This

was terrible—worse even than Louis's reproaches, and they were hard enough to bear! But her heart ached for her child. Maud did not occupy herself in any way, and the terrible brooding stillness was worse to witness than the grief upstairs.

Cut adrift from all that her soul had anchored to, utterly alone as she was with her sorrow, Jean was less to be pitied than her cousin, and the mother saw it.

"I think it is very unfeeling and unjust of Nugent not to take any steps to set himself right with you, Maud," one day ventured Mrs. Poynder. "If only to ask your forgiveness, he ought to have come or written before now."

"Don't worry. How do you know he has not written?"

"Has he, dear?" anxiously.

"I've had a letter."

A letter that had caused her to pace her room like a wild woman nearly the whole of one night, for it confirmed all her worst fears. He had ceased to love her, and all his self-reproaches and entreaties for forgiveness went for nothing now. He had ceased to love her! Worse than all, he had ventured to appeal to her womanly feeling on Jean's account; and, few and constrained as his words were, his anxiety showed terribly through them. He wrote to her as to a good woman—the Maud he had always had faith in—trusting her cousin to her kindness, and begging her to believe that neither in thought, word, nor deed had Jean been untrue to her.

She laughed aloud over the passage. "Kindness! Kindness to Jean!" What did he take her for—one of the spaniel women, who love all the better for being beaten? Ah, the misery of having to wait for that Indian letter, with the dread that when it came she might only find herself more powerless than she was now! To be, perhaps, obliged for the rest of her life to keep up some semblance of cousinly feeling. There was only one faint hope to live upon—the possibility of the will not having been executed, and some former one made before he took Jean into his favor still existing. She made no reply to Nugent Orme's letter. If he supposed he was going to escape so easily, he would find himself very much mistaken. There was something yet to hold him by—his honor. Without news about either Maud or Jean—his aunt would tell him nothing, assuming an air of cold, dignified disapproval, though she was finding it more difficult every hour, and he dared not compromise either by asking questions elsewhere—Nugent Orme was passing his time as wretchedly as Maud could desire.

Half the short nights—as long as he could do so unobserved—were passed in watching the window of Jean's room. She sat there long hours, her eyes upturned to the stars,

unconscious of his nearness, but the prayers offered up for her did not remain unanswered. Even he could see with keen-sightedness of love that, hopeless and cast down as she looked, her spirit had been only bent, not broken, by the storm which had burst over her. Louis and he had met but once since the crisis, and the former's scowling looks and half-averted face had taught him what he might expect from that quarter. His faithlessness to Maud was not his worst offense in Louis Poynder's eyes; nor his love for Jean. It was the latter's love for Nugent which could not be got over.

Maud had meanwhile amused herself, if it might be called amusement, by exciting her brother's worst passions. While taking none into her confidence respecting her own feelings, she rather enjoyed exposing her brother's selfishness and vanity, though he did not scruple to throw back all sorts of coarse taunts in reply. She was quite impervious to such arrows as he could aim. She did not mind his telling her that she was in the same boat, with rather worse chances for the future—couldn't he find lots of girls ready enough to jump at an offer from him—and so forth, when she laughed at him for fancying Jean was in love with him. His telling her that she had fancied the same thing with respect to Orme did not sting her as her words stung him. With her the sting was in the fact that the thing was possible, and not in any thing he could say about it; while it enraged him almost beyond endurance to be taunted about having lost Jean and her fortune together. Mrs. Poynder sat silently crying, afraid to utter a word.

The days dragged drearily on at the cottage; never was waiting more weary. Maud's one little distraction was ordering the mourning, the richest and most becoming to be had for money, with all the newest devices in the way of ornament. It was some little solace to know that black was not so unbecoming to her as to most people. If not selected with quite the same eye to the becoming, Jean's mourning was also expensive and suitable for the daughter of a rich man. If she proved to be her father's heiress, as he had asserted she would be, they dared not offend her. "I must wait," Maud told herself again and again. The "waiting" was not much less a trial to Louis and her mother.

Fortunately for herself, Jean was not present when the long-looked-for letter arrived. She had been accorded the privilege of doing as she pleased in the matter of joining them as she grew stronger, and had gladly availed herself of it, living almost entirely in her own room. The ten days' rest and quiet had restored her to a more healthy state, both physically and mentally. Little did she share or even suspect the others' ex-

citement about the coming letter. He was dead, and the rest mattered nothing. She had not at any time given much thought to the money part of the question, attributing almost all her advantages to her aunt's kindness, and forgetting the checks as soon as they had passed through her hands. She had every thing she required—more than she had ever dared to hope for when she was at Ivy Lodge—and she did not trouble herself to inquire the cost of it, so that her aunt was satisfied. Indeed, she had very indefinite ideas of the money value of things, never having been accustomed to spend. If she gave a passing thought to future arrangements, it was to hope all would go on as before. After Maud was married she would try to be a daughter to dear Aunt Maria, and they would live peacefully on at Fernside. The picture seemed a little colorless at present, but it would be different when she had learned to be good—when she could hear his name without her cheeks burning and her heart throbbing, as they did now.

Mother, son, and daughter quite astonished the servants by their suddenly acquired habit of early rising, each making an effort to be in the breakfast-room by the time the morning post came in.

At last all appearances were forgotten when their eyes one morning lighted upon the expected letter. With trembling fingers Mrs. Poynder snatched the letter from the wondering maid's hand, in her haste scattering five or six others which accompanied it upon the carpet.

"No, do not wait—go away," as the girl stooped to gather them up.

Maud took the letter from her mother's trembling fingers, which essayed in vain to open it. It was immediately snatched from her by Louis, who tore it open, and greedily devoured the contents.

"Hurra!"

"What—oh, Louis, tell us!" exclaimed his mother.

"All right, it's mine!"

She sunk on to a seat. "Tell me, please, dears!" But neither gave a moment's thought to her. Her son stood gazing out of the window, with a triumphant smile upon his face, trying to realize the "splendid luck," and Maud was going slowly through the letter word by word, the color deepening in her face as she read. Presently she said, with a quiet smile, addressing her brother:

"It's mamma's first, you know."

He laughed. "All the same, isn't it, matter? It's worth something to be your son, after all."

"Has your uncle left his money to—us, then, dears?" asked the bewildered mother.

Lost in pleasant thought, her eyes dwelling smilingly upon some mental picture, Maud heeded her not. But at length her son condescended to explain to her.

"Yes, it's all right for us. The old man made a will just before he died, cutting us out as he promised, but it appears it must have been destroyed, and she can only take what we choose to give her. Then his marriage to her mother is supposed to have been all a myth. There is no evidence of it to be found, and there was always a mystery about the woman he took out with him twenty years ago, and she must have died long since. There is no doubt whatever about it, Jean is illegitimate, and we take all as nearest of kin. Won by a fluke!"

Mrs. Poynder uttered a sigh of relief. Never to be pressed for money again! "Is it much, Louis?"

"Much! I should think so! Supposed to bring in nearly five thousand a year."

At which poor Mrs. Poynder became hysterical. "She shall have every thing heart could wish; she shall never know the want of money—shall she, dears? I will go this minute and tell her that—"

"No!" Maud laid her hand upon her mother's arm, and added, with a smile which the other shrunk a little from, "I will tell her."

"Don't quite kill her," laughed her brother, whom good fortune made a little generous to Jean. "Jove, Maud, I did not think you had so much of the vixen in you! What furies you women are to each other!"

"You—will tell her gently, won't you, Maud dear?" pleaded Mrs. Poynder, as her daughter swept out of the room.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### HOW MAUD BROKE THE NEWS.

WELL might Jean shrink back in her seat with a little cry of alarm, when, swift and silent, Maud entered the room, and locked the door behind her.

"Is there any thing the matter, Maud? Why do you look at me like that?"

Maud stood looking, only looking, at the girl who "had won his love from her—who had stepped between her and happiness." But it was enough to make Jean rise nervously from her seat and shrink farther away.

"Are you angry with me?" she faltered.

For a few moments Maud made no reply, her eyes still fixed upon Jean with that terrible look; then presently she asked, in a low voice, "If some crawling thing had stung you, and you had got it under your heel, what should you do?"

"Crush it, perhaps; but I should be very sorry to do it, Maud."

"I should not," and her eyes so unmistakably hungered to crush, that Jean cowered back again with a low cry. She saw now that her secret was known, and that she must expect no mercy.

Maud laughed aloud. "Why, a viper could not look more afraid."

"I am not afraid, Maud, only sorry, very, very sorry, that you think me so bad as I see you do."

"Bad! is there any word bad enough for a girl who could treacherously take advantage of a friend's absence to spread a net for her lover?"

"I spread no net. I did not know—oh! Maud, do believe it, I did not know he was your lover, and I couldn't help loving him until it was too late. When I let him see it, he told me at once that he was engaged to you."

But it was not that Jean loved him; what would her love have mattered to Maud if he had not returned it? She could have watched the heart-breaking process calmly enough in Jean's case. The never-to-be-forgiven offense was that he loved her.

"Do you think I will ever release him?"

"He does not desire it, and he knows I do not."

Maud chafed at her quiet, hopeless tone. She had expected passionate weeping—all sorts of rhapsodical lamentations; but what was there to triumph over here?

"You will never persuade me that you did not know."

"But indeed, indeed, I did not!"

"You will never persuade me."

"But I shall know it myself, and that will prevent my being as miserable as though I had wronged you intentionally, Maud. I shall not be entirely without comfort."

"You are thinking of your father's promise to leave you his money?"

"No."

"I say, yes. You are thinking of the power it will give you; all that you can do with five thousand a year?"

"It would not buy what I care for most. It would not buy my father back for me, or it should be thankfully given."

"Very sentimental, but how if it is not yours to give, after all—if you have neither father nor money?" Fixing her eyes eagerly on the girl's face, she went on: "What if the will was never signed? What if your mother was never married to my uncle, and you are illegitimate, and left dependent upon our bounty for your bread?"

"Not married!" faintly echoed Jean, every vestige of color dying out of her face.

"At last! Yes: one of those women who—"

"We are women, Maud."

"Do not bracket yourself with me."

"Is that all I've got to know?" whispered Jean.

"Is it not enough? Can there be any thing worse than to be branded as one degraded among women?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

Maud stared at her, for the moment utter-

ly dumfounded, as she went on passionately: "It would be worse a thousand times to be degraded, and I am not."

Maud caught her arm, roughly shaking it in her anger and mortification; she was all the more violent for beginning to feel ashamed of her own violence. She had not meant to go such lengths as this, but then she had imagined the victory would be more easy. She hated the girl all the more for making her lose her self-respect in this way. She must bring her to her knees now at any cost.

"Have not you one spark of womanly feeling? Are you proud of being the child of shame?"

"Oh, Maud, do you *like* to say such things to me?" ejaculated Jean, the tears streaming down her cheeks, utterly unable to comprehend the other's feeling. "I was so very sorry for you."

"How dare you tell me that? Sorry for me! You! whom every one will scorn."

"I don't feel a bit more deserving of scorn than I did yesterday, and it can't make so very much difference, or else people would have found it out and scorned me before." Then, remembering what Maud had had to bear, and allowing for what was perhaps a consequence of her disappointment, it almost looked as though it had affected her brain a little, she used to be so very different, she went on more gently: "Cousin Maud, do believe me. I am very, very sorry to have caused you any pain. I am more sorry for that than being scorned, ever so much, and I know you don't really mean to be unkind to me."

Maud looked moodily at her. If she could have felt that the girl was only a fool. How much better she could have borne any amount of anger than this!

"What do you intend to do for a living?" Not that Maud in her heart intended to drive the other to work for it. The mere cost of her food and clothes would matter nothing to them now, and she was not ungenerous with money.

"Oh, do not think about that," cheerfully replied Jean, anxious to set her cousin's mind at rest upon that point. "I should really prefer having work to do now; I should not have so much time for thinking, you know, and I never minded work."

At last beginning dimly to perceive what kind of armor it was that blunted her weapons, Maud moodily unlocked the door, and went forth defeated. She saw now that in her haste to strike she had gone too far. It would never do to incur the scandal of turning Jean out-of-doors just after her father's death and their inheritance of the property; it would be making a martyr of her at once. Besides, it would be necessary to keep up appearances with the Ormes. In her heart of hearts she was not without some gleam-

ings of hope that Nugent might be won back to his allegiance. She knew that, however he might desire to be free, he would now hold himself bound until she chose to release him, and trusted to be able to win back his love if she could contrive to get him to come to Fernside, and be on something like the old friendly footing with them once more. He had loved her (she still tried to believe that, although those few words he had spoken to Jean were so terribly unlike any she had ever heard him utter to herself), and was deeply conscious of having wronged her—both advantages on her side, to begin with. And now, in her cooler moments, Maud reflected that it would be the height of folly to offend Miss Orme! She could not afford to lose so very useful a partisan. So, when next the little lady presented herself at Fernside, her dear Maud found herself well enough to be seen, and gave her a very affectionate reception.

"You may imagine what I have endured when it has prevented my seeing even such a dear old friend as you," said Maud, returning the little lady's kisses, hating the deception, yet sincerely believing that not she but circumstances were to blame for forcing her to use it. Would not she have preferred doing right? Had not she always preferred good to evil?

"Don't say a word, my love; I quite understand. I only wonder you are as well as you are after such cruel—"

"You must not think I blame Nugent, dear Miss Orme; I can never believe that he meant to wrong me."

"How good and like yourself, dear Maud; how very good!" ejaculated the little lady, very much comforted. It had been so terrible to believe that her boy was to blame. She could not think it, though she meant to be loyal to Maud, and it was a great relief to hear the latter absolve him. "I do not want to speak about her, now she is in trouble, but we all know where the blame rests. The best of people err sometimes, and my poor Nugent was too unsuspecting"—which was the utmost limit her blame could reach. "I can only hope that she may be brought to see her error in its true light. Her father's death seemed quite a judgment—quite a judgment."

Miss Orme returned to the Grange with just the impression she was intended to carry home. "Dear Maud bore her trial so meekly, uttering not a word of complaint, and had been so thankful for her kind old friend's loving sympathy." All was circumstantially repeated to her silent nephew, with the little additional speech so-carefully taught by Maud.

"What the dear girl feels most is your avoidance of them ever since, Nugent. What have *they* done, you know? Not one word of blame have they uttered! Poor Maud

expressly said she did not blame you. But she could not repress her tears when she said it seemed so hard to have lost your friendship as well as your love, when she had never uttered one word of reproach. If you would only look in at Fernside sometimes on your way past, you know, dear, it would not seem so marked."

"I will call certainly, if they wish it; but I think it would be better taste to let things remain as they are, for the present," he replied, a little hesitatingly; wondering that Maud should desire him to call.

"You have not any unkindly feeling toward poor Maud, dear Nugent?" anxiously.

"No; she knows it."

"Then do not you like to go because you are—" Was he afraid of himself if he met that artful girl again? Miss Orme had succeeded in convincing herself that Jean had, so to speak, bewitched him against his will, and believed that if she were kept out of his sight he would very soon forget her and return to his first love. Perhaps dear Nugent was afraid of trusting himself in Jean's vicinity again. "I do not think you need be afraid of meeting any one you do not wish to see, Nugent; I hear no one sees her; she has sufficient decency to keep out of sight; and—" Her nephew's eyes warned her to say no more; but she flattered herself with the hope that she had not been entirely unsuccessful.

Nor had she. Surprised as he was at Maud inviting him (what was it but an invitation?) to go to Fernside, at any rate so soon, he felt that he could not decline her invitation. The next day he made his appearance at the cottage, somewhat awkwardly inquiring for Mrs. Poynder, conscious that the maid-servant delayed her reply to study him with curious eyes, in full possession of the story of his faithlessness, as indeed was every one he met.

He was shown into the drawing-room, and a council was immediately called in the kitchen to discuss his probable state of mind—his looks, tone of voice, the issue of the visit, etc., etc.

The visit passed off more tolerably than he had anticipated. Carefully prepared by her daughter, Mrs. Poynder behaved admirably. She was as cordial as an old friend should be in her tone, with only just a *suspicion* of dejection and lowering of the eyelids now and then; while Maud seemed most anxious to divest his mind of the idea that she desired in any way to recriminate upon him for the trouble that had come upon her. He was impressed with the belief that, as far as possible, she wished to spare him, and avoided giving any sign of her own suffering, or appealing even indirectly to his sympathy. She could not, of course, prevent his seeing that she looked very pale and out of health; but she excused that by ex-

plaining that "dear Uncle Oliver's death had come upon them so suddenly." Her generosity was fully appreciated, though it caused his tone to become lower and more regretful. He felt terribly guilty of having caused that other and evidently deeper suffering. She had known her uncle too slightly to mourn for him to such an extent as to affect her health. His manifest self-condemnation was very satisfactory to Maud. But just as she was congratulating herself upon getting on so well, Jean's voice was heard in the hall as she entered from the garden. It was only a word or two addressed to one of the servants as she passed the drawing-room door on her way to her own room; but Maud was quite startled at the effect. He seemed for the moment completely unmann'd, and for the rest of his stay remained disturbed and abstracted, finding the greatest difficulty in doing his part of the conversation. Maud mentally vowed vengeance upon Jean. But she presently told herself that she must be patient with him; upon the whole, things had gone as smoothly as she could expect from a first visit. He had evidently done his best, and felt terribly conscious of having brought trouble upon her. Then she tried to believe that his disturbance at the sound of Jean's voice did not necessarily proceed from his love for her. She must, if possible, keep him to paying them an occasional visit. Her last words, as he rose to take leave, uttered in a timid, hesitating voice, "May I beg the loan of the last *Quarterly*, Nugent? I am so desirous to see Müller's article, and the Raystone people are so long in getting things," was a masterpiece in its way.

Quite ashamed of having obliged her to ask for it, accustomed as she had always been to receive it, he replied hastily, "Oh yes, I will send it immediately; I hope you will excuse my having forgotten to do so before." He was a little surprised, nevertheless, that she had any thought to give to such a matter at that moment. On his way home he puzzled a good deal over his reception, it had been so very friendly and cordial, so much more so than he had expected or had any right to expect. It almost looked as if— Was there any possibility that Maud had found out that her sentiments toward him had been, after all, no warmer than his were toward her, and she was going to be content with friendship? He was afraid to indulge the hope.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A BIT OF SUNSHINE.

THE time was passing drearily enough with Jean. With the elasticity of youth she had soon regained her mental and bod-



ly health; but, from want of proper exercise, both were a little deteriorating again. She had had an intuitive knowledge of her own need when she told Maud that she would be all the better for having work to do. Her present life afforded too much time for thought, while supplying no healthy food for it. She was almost always alone; it had come to be understood that she was not to make her appearance in the drawing-room when visitors were there, and Maud arranged that her exercise should be taken at a time when she was not likely to meet any of their acquaintances; although even that contingency would not be inimical to herself now that people were prepared to regard the girl as not belonging to their sphere—a nobody dependent upon the Poynders' charity. Jean walked her couple of hours or so in the early morning, about as enjoyably as she had got through the recreative walks at Ivy Lodge. "If only they would speak to me sometimes, and Maud would let me do something!" sighed Jean, envying the maid-servants as they laughed and chattered over their work in the kitchen.

Suddenly a bit of sunlight found its way into her life. Her aunt and cousins were out, and free to roam about the house as she pleased (no visitor would be admitted during their absence), she took her book into the drawing-room. She was poring over it, trying to imagine herself one of a merry touring party described, when the door was softly opened, and some one entered the room. She did not raise her eyes from her book, taking it for granted that it was one of the servants upon some errand. To her astonishment, she suddenly found two arms put round her neck, and a hearty kiss pressed upon her cheek.

"Annie—Miss Lawrence?" she ejaculated, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry in her astonishment. This was more like the Annie of old than the stiff young lady who barely accorded Jean a bow upon the two or three occasions they had happened to meet since that memorable day of the fête.

"Annie, if you please, my dear. Pray don't look so scared. I hope you are not sorry to see me?"

"Oh no, no! How could I be? Only I did not expect to see you, and I've been so—stupid lately."

Annie nodded: "You see it was no use telling me that you couldn't, wouldn't, or shouldn't be seen. They might have known that was just the way to insure my seeing you."

"How kind of you! Oh, Annie dear, did you really want to see me?" eagerly asked Jean, with flushing cheeks.

Annie laughed. "If I'm to be absolutely sincere, I am not quite sure that I did, until somebody talked me into it. Well, give

me a kiss, child; I promised not to say one word that might sound like a reproach, and I suppose I *must* like you a tiny little since I feel so awfully glad to see you again. Naughty heroines are all the rage, or else I shouldn't, of course. Good gracious, how I do envy you!"

"Envy me—me! Oh, Annie, you don't know, then!"

"Oh yes, I do. It's all over the place, you know. A lover dying for you, when he ought to be dying for somebody else; somebody else ready to kill you, but trying to behave like an amiable martyr. Nobody's child; without fortune, friends, or any thing else but lovers—all sorts of delicious complications. I should think I do envy you! Poor I am obliged to do every thing in the most humdrum manner, engaged in the tamest way to every body's satisfaction. Arthur says he will run away with me if I like; but where's the use, when every body knows we can be married whenever we please?"

"Arthur—Mr. Brayleigh?"

"Yes; it has come to that, dear; I did once think I cared most for Louie, but it turned out to be Arthur. The worst is, he took me by surprise, and the moment he spoke found out that I cared for him; so he wasn't even kept in suspense. He's such a dear, too, that I really can't quarrel with him. He helped me to make my way to you, but I promised the girl not to tell how, and we have so enjoyed outwitting Miss Maud. Do tell me, Jean; isn't she more wild about it than she pretends to be? I don't believe in her, and that's the truth! I'm quite sure she's not quite so sweet about it as she wants people to believe. I never did like martyrs! Why, even you can look daggers sometimes, and Edward says you are just the girl. Ah, that reminds me, I was to say all the kind things I could think of. He made me learn a most elaborate speech about his deep respect, and regret for your trouble, and all that. But the gist of it is that he is a dear good old fellow, and wants you to understand that if you need a friend there is one at the Elms ready-made."

"How good of him—how very, very good!"

"Don't be sentimental, there's a dear. His being good is not a cause for tears, you know. Besides, you look—what word was that, Arthur? Oh, hipped enough already!"

"Hipped?"

"Cut-up—worried, you know," with a superior air.

"I could hardly be any thing else, after—"

"Oh no, no, of course not; you must not mind my way." Then, to create a diversion, "What do you think of this jacket, dear?"

"It's very—" Utterly at a loss what to say, Jean added, "Nice and warm, isn't it?"

"But the shape—what does it look like, child?"

"Isn't it—something like a—gentleman's short coat?" hesitatingly.

"Yes," delightedly replied Annie. "Of course it is; I had it made by Edward's tailor. Daring, isn't it? And this cravat; do you notice? No one could take this for a lady's. I buy them at the hosier's, to make quite sure, and I won't have it called a tie, because that's of no gender."

Jean began to laugh. "You really do look like a boy at the top of you, Annie!"

"All right!" replied Annie, contentedly. Presently she went on, eying the other a little curiously; "I suppose you are engaged to Nugent Orme now, Jean?"

"No; oh no, no!"

"Then that accounts for Miss Maud being so meek about it. But there can't be much chance for her, after his falling in love with you."

"Mr. Orme wishes her to be his wife, Annie, and I think she will be."

"The story is that he doesn't wish it."

"I can not think how such a thing got about."

"Don't you know, Jean? In the simplest way in the world. It appears that when you heard of the bad news from India, you became insensible, and he got frightened, and talked to you in the most loving way before all the servants—quite raved over you. Their house-maid told our Emma, while Maud stood listening, as white as a ghost."

"How terrible for her!"

"Well, it couldn't have been very pleasant. I shouldn't like to stand by while Arthur was making violent love to another girl, certainly; but it would make some difference if she did not want him, as I suppose you did not?" with a keen, questioning glance into the girl's face.

Poor Jean! In spite of herself, a burning flush mounted to her brow, and her eyes fell.

"Ah!" ejaculated Annie. "I do believe you are as good as somebody always said you were, and that you are going in for self-sacrifice and all that! I should think if he were here he would say that I might go on now," she mused, studying Jean's face. "He said I was not to let any thing, not even her engagement to Nugent Orme, deter me." She added, aloud, "I haven't told you yet what I came specially to say, Jean. I am going to stay at Eastbourne with Arthur's aunt for three months. Between ourselves, I think she's going to try to convert me from the error of my ways. She actually told me one day that she feared I had a tendency to fastness—as if it were desirable to be slow! Anyway, she has taken a house at Eastbourne, and talked papa over about the good it will do me to have three months with her before my marriage, as I had nev-

er experienced the advantage of a mother's care and counsel. Mamma died while I was an infant, you know. Poor papa insists upon my going, and even Arthur dared to say it would do me good. I've been thinking that there's one thing that would make it bearable, and only one, that is your coming with me."

"Oh, Annie, what a kind thought! How very good!"

"Don't admire the goodness too much, my dear; it may not have originated from myself, you know. But I shall be really thankful if you will come. Fancy how awful it would be to be imprisoned for three months with a stiff old woman who seems to have no other subject for conversation but feminine propriety—propriety!"

"I don't know how to thank you, but—"

"You won't come?"

"I can not, Annie."

"You are afraid of Maud! It is no use denying it, for I know you are; but leave me to manage her. I will get her into such a corner that she will be forced to consent. My dear, I should quite enjoy it!" said the laughing girl. "I should like to give her a pat for every little nasty speech she has made to me. Only say you will come, and I'll take care she shall let you. She *may* be a little glad to get you out of the way, you know. Say you will, Jean?"

But Jean shook her head. Grateful as she felt for their kindness, she saw that she ought not to enter into any closer relationship with the Lawrences. So, though Annie Lawrence used all the arguments she could think of, she went away unsuccessful.

But she left Jean a great deal cheered by the visit. It brightened her wonderfully to know that the Lawrences, who seemed acquainted with so much of what had occurred, could still have such kindly feeling toward her. If they had even known the worst part, she couldn't help believing they would have been pitiful.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### MRS. POYNTER'S DISCOVERY.

WHEN next Miss Orme ventured to allude to Jean in talking to her nephew it was as she had been tutored to do by Maud.

"Who is Miss Bell?" he asked, after hearing the name repeated two or three times.

"Do not you know, Nugent? Oh no; I ought to have remembered that they would not tell you any thing against her (had not Maud said they would not?) in any way. Miss Raymond, as she was called, never had any right to the name, it appears. So far as is known, her name is Bell."

"Bell?"

"It turned out that Mr. Raymond was

never married, Nugent. I always felt that there was something wrong about the girl, and, as dear Maud says, I very rarely err. Of course her mother would never have introduced such a person to her friends had she known what she does now. But dear Maud says they should not think of making any difference in their treatment of her now, though they can not oblige other people to associate with her. She shall always have a home there."

All of which was to show him "dear Maud's" generosity and largeness of spirit. But the reception of it was much too matter-of-course to please the little lady. She considered that Nugent ought to be a great deal more impressed with Maud's goodness and generosity toward her rival than he appeared to be. But his matter-of-course reception of the intelligence was, in fact, more really complimentary to her favorite than would have been the astonishment his aunt expected. If his respect for Maud's character had slightly diminished of late, it was so slightly that he was hardly aware of it, and it did not enter his head that she could be other than kind to Jean. If not quite capable of the same kind of generosity toward Jean as the latter's toward her, he believed it was of the ordinary quality; sufficient to prevent any display of unkindly feeling. He little imagined what Jean was subjected to!

After that first visit of his, there had been a sharp attack upon her by Maud.

"I supposed if you had not the right feeling you would have the decency to keep a little in the background, without being told to do so. When Mr. Orme is here again, I beg you will not try to attract his attention by talking outside the door."

"I did not know that I attracted his notice, Maud. I'm sure he would not think I wished to do so."

"How can you tell what he thinks of you, now he knows your wretched antecedents?"

"He does not think worse of me for knowing them." Sadly enough, but so quietly and decidedly as to cause the color to rise in Maud's cheeks. "Why will not you let me go away, Maud?"

"Because I choose you to remain. You would like to set up for being a martyr, I dare say; but you shall not have the opportunity. We can not help people objecting to associate with you, and are, therefore, obliged to request you to keep out of the way when visitors come; but every thing that money can purchase you can have. You can not say that any thing is denied you, and you can be as comfortable as you choose to make yourself."

Jean gave a long, steady look at the picture of the future marked out for her, then turned from it with a little impatient gesture, and replied, "I don't want to be a

martyr, Maud. But I really should be one if I staid here for the sake of food and clothes, when I should much prefer working to earn them."

Maud reflected a few moments before replying. Though it would never do for them to turn Jean out, it would be very desirable, indeed, if she could be made to go of her own accord, and it could afterward be shown that she had so gone. How much easier it would make matters, especially with regard to Nugent Orme, if Jean could be induced to take herself off! She replied, with a smile,

"All romantic girls talk in that way, I suppose; food and clothes, as you call them, appear such very prosaic things to you. But I do not think you would be quite so high-flown if you were put to the test and had to work for them. Anyway, you can not pretend that there is any necessity for you to do so."

From that time Jean found her life at Fernside any thing but an easy one. She was subjected to all sorts of petty annoyances; and, although she could not realize that they were really intended to wound, she experienced all the discomfort she was intended to feel. The servants began to treat her with systematic rudeness and neglect; and if she asked for the most trifling service, it was rendered as though under protest. She would gladly have waited upon herself, and fetched a jug of water, or what not, when she wanted it. But that she was not allowed to do. Cook "wasn't going to have people peeping and prying about *her* kitchen." So when she wanted water, and it was very rarely put in her room now, she was made to ring again and again, and had to submit to the house-maid's impertinence about the hardship of having to wait upon "upstarts," when at length the jug was thumped down just inside her room. Downstairs there was Louis Poynder's scarcely more refined rudeness to be borne. He was taking elaborate pains to prove to her how very little he cared for her, and the more unsuccessful were his endeavors to pique her, the more persistent did he become. Once or twice he struck fire, and, turning upon him with flaming cheeks and angry eyes, she passionately struck back again, blow for blow. But she would come to him afterward, asking forgiveness like a child.

"Oh, Louis, I am so sorry; do forgive me! I ought to have known that you could not mean to be unkind! I am always having tempers lately, and taking things wrong. Oh yes, it is wrong and wicked to think you capable of really wishing to be unkind after all you have done for me!"

At which he would turn sullenly away with some muttered speech about her being a fool. "The girl must be a fool!" he told himself so over and over again. "What could it be but stupidity to believe in peo-

ple to the extent she seemed to believe?" Yet he was forced to acknowledge that the stupidity foiled him. There was the difference between himself and his sister, that Maud would have given half she possessed to believe Jean stupid, and could not. She had the keener pang of perceiving the truth while she fought against it.

Then, in spite of themselves, her carelessness about the money touched them. True, they ascribed it to her inexperience and ignorance of what money could buy; her want of taste for the beautiful, and so forth; but the fact remained that she was honestly glad they had come into her father's fortune. Mrs. Poynder was quite overwhelmed with gratitude toward her, and meant to give her substantial proof of it when things were a little more settled. At present dear Louis and Maud kept her so completely engaged. She did not suspect that her daughter had any other end than was apparent in keeping her so much occupied as to have no time to give to Jean. Maud was determined that the latter must be got rid of some way (it was no use taking any decided steps toward winning Nugent Orme back to his allegiance so long as the girl remained there), and contrived to keep her mother constantly occupied, and apart from Jean.

Now that the fortune was assured to them, all sorts of schemes were contemplated for the future; Louis Poynder taking upon himself the management, and settling of it all in the most matter-of-course way, taking his mother's acquiescence for granted. Her rôle in the programme was simply to sign checks, he laughingly informed her. As soon as the necessary business of proving her heirship, etc., was gone through, she found herself signing checks at a rate which rendered it problematical whether five thousand a year would suffice the needs of her children. But they told her that it was only the back debts pressing for payment all at once. When they were once settled, things would run on smoothly enough. But, of course, Louis must now have his chambers in town, horses, servants, etc. "The *mater* wouldn't expect him to live like a pauper now, and living like a gentleman would cost money. Say she put down a thousand for him to begin with, for horses, and furniture, and things; he meant to furnish his room properly, of course."

It was two months after the arrival of the last letter, in which it was stated that a few of the late Mr. Raymond's personal effects (he had left nothing of much value in that way) had been dispatched by the long passage. They had duly arrived, and been carefully looked over by Mrs. Poynder and her daughter, who had found nothing of importance. All was contained in one large chest—books, an old-fashioned mahogany desk, in which were some packets of letters chiefly

from Mrs. Poynder herself, bank vouchers, a few trinkets of small value, the dead man's watch and chain, etc., and a small trunk filled with woman's clothes; the fashion of which dated some sixteen or eighteen years back, and told nothing of the wearer. Maud and her mother minutely examined each and every thing, searching carefully in every fold for any scrap of intelligence respecting the woman who had lived with Oliver Raymond. But they found that the lawyer had been right; there was not the slightest clue to the person who had worn the things other than the name "M. Bell" upon some of the linen, yellow with age. The quality of the clothes neither indicated luxury nor poverty, and showed no individuality whatever, in the way of make or ornament. The few things had been found as though left untouched for many years, and the lawyer had at first hesitated about sending them until he found there was nothing of sufficient importance to fill the chest, then put the small trunk in just as it was. It had doubtless belonged to the so-called wife, and might possibly tell something to feminine eyes.

All doubts set at rest, the Poynders entered joyfully into their possessions. They were even generous enough to give Jean her father's watch and chain, and Mrs. Poynder suggested that she might like to have his desk.

"Well, yes; I don't mind. If she cares for any thing so ugly," said Maud. Upon being offered, Jean expressed herself very thankful. It would be a thousand times more precious to her than the best desk to be bought for money.

"We must examine it well first, you know," said Maud to her mother when they were alone again. "Those old-fashioned desks have secret compartments and false bottoms sometimes. Look it well over yourself, and then let me see it before you give it to her."

A few hours later Maud was in her own room in pleasant contemplation upon the possibility of introducing a little violet or gray with the sombre black, when a maid-servant came running hastily to her with a message from Mrs. Poynder, begging her to come immediately to her room.

"I am afraid mistress is taken ill, Miss Maud; she looked dreadfully pale, as if she had had a fright."

Maud hastened to her mother's room. Mrs. Poynder was sitting before the open desk drowned in tears; a large packet in her hand.

"Oh, Maud, my dear child! oh, my poor children!"

"What is it?" ejaculated Maud, every vestige of color dying out of her face, as her eyes fastened upon the parchment in her mother's hand.

"You have not found—not—not—?"

"It is your uncle's will," sobbed Mrs. Poynder. "Oh, what shall we do? How can we pay her back now?"

Maud moved swiftly toward the door, locked it, returned to her mother's side, and took the paper from her nerveless fingers.

Amidst Mrs. Poynder's sobs and sighs and ejaculations of distress, she gathered the contents of the will, which she saw was duly signed and sealed, all that was of moment to them. "The whole of my property, funded and otherwise, to my daughter Jean. Three hundred a year to my sister Maria, wife of the said James Poynder, during her life. Fifty pounds each to her son and daughter, Maud and Louis," etc., etc., read Maud, the letters dancing mockingly before her eyes.

"Oh, it's too dreadful, my poor dear children, my—"

"Be still, mamma! can not you be quiet? You will be heard all over the house!"

"My poor children!—cruel, cruel!"

"Will you be quiet?" said Maud, in a low voice. "Can not you see that it need not make any difference?"

"No difference!" echoed Mrs. Poynder, the tears streaming down her face as she looked up into her daughter's eyes, a little ray of hope beginning to appear in her own. "You mean she would be generous to us, dear? Yes, I ought to have thought of that, and it's good of you to remind me." For in truth the poor mother had been more afraid of the effect of the revelation upon Maud than any thing else.

"I do not intend to give her the opportunity to exercise her generosity," coldly replied Maud; as she spoke, looking round the room for means to do what she wanted to do, and rapidly arguing out with her conscience the necessity of doing it. The act was forced upon her—it was simply defending her mother from a gross injustice, and the blame would lie with him who had made such an iniquitous will! Once the act was done, her mother would be amenable to reason—never while the will was in existence.

"I do not understand," said Mrs. Poynder, shrinking a little from her daughter's eyes, and grasping the will with a tighter hold.

Some one was tapping at the door. Maud lifted a finger to her lips, and gave a warning glance toward her mother; not a little astonishing the latter by her suddenly recovered self-control as she said, in her usual voice,

"Who is there?"

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Orme is in the drawing-room."

"Say that Mrs. Poynder is not very well, and I am attending her. Ask him to excuse me, Phœbe. No one else is there, I suppose?"

"Only Miss Bell, ma'am."

"Only Miss Bell! only Jean! Wait, Phœbe." Maud stood hesitating between

the two evils, glancing at her mother's tear-stained face. "I think I will go down. Yes; say that I will come in a few moments." Then, as the maid went on her errand, Maud turned toward her mother again.

"Give it to me, mamma."

But Mrs. Poynder seemed suddenly to have become decided and unyielding. Though she spoke no word, she clasped her two hands over the will, and held it pressed tightly to her heart.

"You see I *must* go down, mamma; she is alone with him. Well, will you promise not to mention a word to any one till I have seen you again?" Then, with a little laugh (she saw she must try to disarm her mother's suspicions,) she added, "Don't be afraid, mamma. I am not going to do any thing dreadful. Put the will back into its place, and try to remain silent about it until we have talked over the best method of telling her together." Then, remembering that prevention is better than cure, she added, as she reached the door, "Come down to the drawing-room immediately you have put it away; will you promise me that?"

"Yes, dear," and Mrs. Poynder turned toward the desk to do her daughter's bidding.

Maud went swiftly on her way toward the drawing-room.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### GONE.

JEAN had ventured into the drawing-room in search of a book, and, happening to light upon a new Tennyson, stood dreaming over it longer than she was aware of. It was a greater trial than either had yet gone through, when Nugent Orme was suddenly ushered into the room. Had they been prepared, each was capable of keeping up appearances; but for the first few moments they could not utter a word beyond the ejaculations,

"Jean!"

"Nugent!"

Then she murmured something about going to look for Aunt Maria, and turned toward the door. He tried to remember that he had no right to detain her—that she had every reason to wish to avoid him; but, as she neared the door, he forgot every thing but that she was going, and in a moment was by her side.

"Say you forgive me, Jean—say it!" his eyes fixed with miserable yearning upon her white face: it had grown so terribly thin and sorrowful since his love had shadowed her life. Forgetting to allow for the natural regret at her father's death, he took upon himself all the blame for the change which he perceived in her.

"Need I say it?" she whispered. "Oh, Nugent, don't you know?"

"Child—Jean, Jean, I want the words," he ejaculated, hardly knowing what he said, in the terrible fear that she was slipping away from him; his eyes pleading for a little respite—only a few moments. But he presently overcame, and went on gently, "No; do not say them; I have no right to ask it; no right to say any thing more than God keep you, Jean—Miss Raymond."

"You must not call me that. Haven't you heard? My name is Jean Bell. My mother—my dear mother" (Jean's sympathy had of late leaned more toward the mother who had been wronged, than the father who had wronged her) "was not married to Mr. Raymond, and people don't like me so well because of it." Was not Maud constantly telling her they did not, and was she not obliged to keep out of the way when visitors came on that account?

He uttered a short bitter laugh at the respectability which looked down upon what he would have bartered all he possessed to win. Blind—blind!

She looked wistfully at him; the revelation did not seem to have made any difference in him; his eyes were unmistakably telling her so, though he spoke not. She had judged him rightly, then. She moved another step toward the door, then stood hesitating a moment. Would it be very wrong if she could only say a word or two, which he might be able by-and-by to interpret into farewell as well as forgiveness? She knew it would be a last farewell. She held out her hand, which was eagerly caught between both his own. He would not have dared to take it; but now!

"Nugent, I want you to believe—"

"Very confidential, I am sure, Miss Bell."

He held Jean's hand with a firmer hold. She had put it into his, and not a thousand Mauds could make him release it until Jean bade him.

"I am afraid I am rather *de trop*," went on Maud, almost beside herself with passion.

"No," replied Jean, with a look which asked him to release her hand, "I was only going to say good-bye to Nugent, and I can do that now."

"Nugent, indeed?"

"Good-bye, Nugent," said Jean, in a faltering voice (she knew, what they did not, that it was her last good-bye to him). "When Maud is your wife, try to give her the belief that though I have loved you I have not wronged her," looking up into his eyes with a steady light in her own.

How Maud's proud spirit chafed under the other's words! To owe any thing to the girl who had wronged her! Say what she might, Jean had wronged her, and in the worst way one woman can wrong another! But for his standing there! But she mastered herself sufficiently to keep

back the worst that rose to her lips, and said, coldly,

"Spare yourself the trouble of entering into further explanations, I beg, Miss Bell. I have the same objection to rhapsodical scenes which I used to have, although Mr. Orme's taste appears to have changed."

Jean silently turned toward the door again. Nugent Orme opened it for her, bowing reverently as she passed out. Then he turned toward Maud again, and said, gently and firmly (he did not know her yet, and looked upon what had taken place simply as a momentary and, perhaps, natural ebullition of feeling at finding Jean and himself together),

"You ought to know that it would be utterly impossible for Jean to be disloyal to the right, Maud. If I were capable of speaking to her as I have no right to speak, you ought to know she would not listen."

"A great deal may be expressed without speaking. But I do not think she could say more. When it comes to openly telling a man she loves him, a girl has ceased to care any thing about appearances, loyal as she may be."

A hot flush rose to his brow. "Will you never understand her?"

"Are you sure that you do, Nugent?"

Shortly and decidedly he replied, "We must for the future avoid any discussion upon that point, Maud. Indeed, I may not see you again for some time. It is my intention to travel for an indefinite time." He waited a few moments. Would she say the few words which would set him free from the engagement? He had done his best—he had tried to keep faith with her; but after what had occurred when he had lost his self-control by Jean's side that day, he thought that no woman with any self-respect would desire to be his wife. She had the gravest reason for blaming him, and he was deeply sensible of having brought trouble upon her; but how could she still wish to become his wife?

But Maud said, softly, "I hope you will write often, as you promised, Nugent. When do you think of going?"

"I don't know."

Perhaps both were equally glad that Mrs. Poynder came into the room at that moment, obliging them to enter upon a fresh topic. He very soon took his departure. Some Raystone callers came in, and he gladly seized the opportunity to make his escape; although he chafed under Maud's leave-taking, which was a great deal more *empressée* than he considered necessary.

It was hard work for Maud and her mother to keep up appearances, and seem to listen with a well-bred air to the customary Raystone gossip, and both uttered a sigh of relief when the visitors at length rose to take leave.

"Go at once and fetch the will, mamma; bring it down here, and we can talk the matter over," said Maud, remembering that there was no fire in her mother's room until later in the day. "Just throw something over it, not to attract attention, you know."

"Very well, dear," replied Mrs. Poynder, in a depressed tone. Maud wanted to read the will before showing it to Jean, perhaps. They could only trust to Jean's generosity now!

In two minutes she entered the room again with a white, terrified face. "Oh, Maud, Maud!"

"What's the matter now?" angrily asked Maud. Nothing worse could happen than the finding of that wretched will. "I do wish you would not be so excitable. What is it, mamma?"

"It's gone!"

"What—the will? Are you mad? Did not you lock it up as I bade you? Non-sense, you have overlooked it, of course!"

"Oh, Maud, dear, I did put it in the desk; but I am afraid I forgot to lock it, and—it's gone! Somebody must have taken it."

"Did you ask if any one had been in the room—did you *see* any body?" ejaculated Maud, angrily shaking her mother in her excitement.

"Only—"

"Why can't you speak? Only whom?"

"Dear Maud, it could not have been he. I'm sure Louis would not do such a—"

"Did you find him there?"

"I—he wanted to speak to me, and said he had only been there a few minutes."

"Did you tell him what you missed?"

"No, dear, I came straight to you."

"That's the only sensible thing you have done." Maud reflected a few minutes, and then went on: "Now, take my advice, mamma. If you don't want a regular exposure, try to be quite silent about the will. Say not a word to Louis about it, and try to go on just as usual. Louis has, at any rate, relieved us of the responsibility, and taken the consequences upon his own shoulders. We shall soon find out what he intends doing. But one thing is certain, he will not produce the will, and so long as he does not the property is yours. Now, do try and exert a little self-control; if Louis does not choose to produce the will, you can't convict your own son, you know. You *must* keep quiet, unless you wish to ruin him. Come, mamma; go and lie down for an hour, and try to make your appearance as usual at dinner. If I can meet her, surely you may." As her mother went out of the room crushed and miserable under this last blow that had fallen upon her, Maud smiled pleasantly to herself, "The very best thing that could have happened, and just at the right moment to spare me!"

To their great relief, Jean sent a message

to her aunt pleading a headache, and begging to be excused appearing at dinner. Louis Poynder came hurrying in at the last moment, and his bearing, confused and ashamed to them, and hectoring to the servants, at once confirmed their suspicions. When the servants had quit the room, he turned toward his mother, and, avoiding his sister's eyes, said, in a half-apologetic, half-defiant tone,

"I want you to give me a check for Thwaites, the tobacconist, mother. I forgot his bill in the list I made, and the fellow writes insolently. Hasn't heard of our luck, I suppose."

The tears so near to poor Mrs. Poynder's eyes began to fall. "I do not think that I can sign any more. Oh, Louis, you know I ought not to! Maud, dear, let us give it all up, and leave it to her to do what is right. She will be generous to us; I know she will!"

Louis lay back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, in an attitude of easy negligence, regarding his mother with an amused smile.

Maud rose, opened the door, looked into the hall to make sure there were no listeners, then returned to her seat, and said, quietly,

"What do you say to mamma's proposal, Louis?"

"Give the property to Jean! Likely! Not your suggestion *this* time, eh, Maud? The *mater* never got so Utopian an idea out of you."

"But," began Mrs. Poynder. "Oh, Louis, if you would consent to—"

"Don't be absurd, mother! You can't be in earnest. As there was no will, the money is ours in consequence of her illegitimacy; and if—"

"If there had been one?" asked Maud, softly.

"It would still be ours by right of the old man's promises—if we could get it. So you need have no scruples, mother. It's ours safe enough."

Maud studied his face for a few moments; then said, with a quiet smile, "Take Louis's advice, mamma, and have no further scruples. He knows more about it than we do, I think."

"Much obliged for your good opinion," he returned, with a mock bow.

"Do not be *too* grateful. I only wished mamma to understand that you have taken the responsibility of deciding upon yourself."

"All right!" And with unusual politeness he rose from his seat, and opened the door for his mother and sister to pass out.

"Hadh't I better go and see how dear Jean is now?" fidgeted Mrs. Poynder, when they got into the drawing-room again.

"There is no necessity; you had much better keep where you are, mamma. I told

Phoebe to take her some chicken and sherry, and she will be all the better for being left alone, whether her ailment is headache or temper." For she felt that she must keep strict watch over her mother until she had got over her nervous fits, lest she should disclose the secret, and ruin them all. At tea-time they sent a maid to inquire if Jean felt well enough to join them, or preferred having some sent to her room. Maud was conscious that she would not have so far consulted Jean's wishes the day before. It was impossible just now to forget that the girl was the rightful (or as she preferred to consider it wrongful) owner of the property, although Maud did not feel any less implacable toward her on that account.

The maid returned with the message that Miss Bell would be much obliged if they would allow her to have some tea sent up to her. Maud kept guard over her mother until she had seen her safely in bed, and even then took the precaution of softly locking the room door on the outside, and carrying away the key. Poor mamma was so weak! She must not be trusted alone with Jean until she could be better depended upon.

But the following morning no Jean appeared at the breakfast-table, and a servant, dispatched to summon her, returned with the intelligence that Miss Bell was not in her room.

"Gone for a walk, perhaps," said Maud, afraid to indulge the hope which suddenly sprung up in her heart.

"I do not know, ma'am; but here is a letter, which I found on the table addressed to my mistress."

Maud snatched it from her hand, hurriedly glanced at the contents, and tossed it toward her mother with a look of triumph. "You can go, Phoebe." What it might be necessary to tell the servants could be told by-and-by. Jean had left Fernside. Her letter contained a few words of gratitude to her aunt for past kindness, and the statement that for the future she preferred living as she had been trained to live, by her own exertions, rather than take further advantage of her aunt's bounty; begging her to believe that the life she had chosen would be happiest for her. Until she procured a governess's situation, she was going to a good friend who had promised her protection. She had taken as much clothes as she should need in her mother's trunk, and had fifteen pounds in money, so they need not have any anxiety about her. She ended her letter with love to them all, and entreaties that they would take no steps to find her.

"A fortunate thing for us, is it not, mamma?"

"Fortunate! Oh, Maud!"

"Nonsense! she says she will be with a

friend. Besides, we have no right to prevent her going if we had known she intended to go; she was not under our control. Don't be foolish, mamma. Can not you see that it is the very best thing that could happen for us?"

"I was thinking of *her*!" sobbed out Mrs. Poynder.

"You would show better taste if you thought a little more about those belonging to you. Such excessive sympathy for one who has acted as Jean has to me is, to say the least, in very bad taste." For she saw that she must take a high tone with her mother now.

"I do not think she meant to wrong you, dear; indeed, I do not!"

"Only yesterday she was making the most of a few moments' opportunity to get up a scene with Nugent, and it's no use telling me that she did not mean it!" She put the letter into the fire, and went on. "Now, listen to me, mamma. She says she has gone with a friend, and—"

"To a friend, wasn't it, dear?"

"With, mamma; and as she does not mention her friend's sex, it is pretty certain not to be feminine."

"But—oh, Maud! you do not mean—"

"Pray do not excite yourself so much. If you would only reflect a little, you might be able to think of *my* welfare as well as hers, perhaps."

At which Mrs. Poynder subsided into tears. An hour or two later, when he came into the breakfast-room—Louis had become less than ever regular in his habits since their good-fortune—Maud informed him of Jean's flight.

"Gone!" he ejaculated, taking the news much more seriously than she had expected he would. "Has there been any quarrel? What have you done to drive her away?"

"She has not been driven away. She left a letter for mamma, stating that she has gone off with some friend with whom she will be perfectly happy, and it is pretty evident what sort of a friend he must be."

He stared at her a moment, then burst into a short laugh. "How some of you women can hate each other, and how blind you are to some things! Take my advice, and don't hint any thing of that sort to Orme if you have any idea of trying it on with him again. Romantic little fool as she is, any man would tell you *that's* a thing she can't do—the worst man living would know that, and Orme would see your motive in a moment. Come, I'll bet what you like that she never said it was a 'he' she had gone with. I dare say she said she had gone with a friend, and you put in the 'he' now, didn't you, Miss Maud?"

"I am not accustomed to betting," she replied, coldly. But she altered her tactics, nevertheless; and, in telling her "dear Miss



Orme" of Jean's flight, merely said that it was a great surprise and regret to them. Every thing had been done for her comfort; but poor Jean had always of late seemed restless and, so to speak, conscience-stricken."

It was through his aunt that the news reached Nugent Orme, and it was through her that Maud knew how it had been received.

"My dear, if there were any such thing as witchcraft in these days, I should seriously believe that poor Nugent was under some evil spell. He behaved like a madman, walking about the room, and saying the most dreadful things: not even I escaped! Then he shut himself up in the library for the rest of the day, and started off to town the first thing this morning, looking dreadfully ill. I feel sure he has an attack on his nerve tissues; but he wouldn't say a word beyond good-bye."

"Gone!" ejaculated Maud, with a white face. "Where?"

"James thinks to town. I suppose to look after the business, whatever it is he has invested in. Why he should have gone into business I can not conceive, with his large income. His poor father was so very different!"

But Maud could not believe that it was business, as Miss Orme called it, which had taken him to town. He had explained to her that he was trying the experiment whether working-men might be taught to help themselves in some better way than by striking. He had formed a society for granting loans to poor professional men and tradesmen in opposition to the loan offices, and invested his accumulated capital in it; but Maud knew that its success or non-success would only be to him so much experience gained for or against the scheme, and the money considered to be well spent for that end. She was tormented with the fear that he had set forth in search of Jean.

But very soon Maud had worse than this to endure. Her mother's health suddenly gave way. Jean's abrupt departure, happening just at the crisis it did, and after a long series of anxieties, was a shock greater than Mrs. Poynder was able to bear. She sunk into a low, desponding, hysterical state, from which neither reproaches nor entreaties seemed to have any power to rouse her—a state of mind which Maud found it almost impossible to cope with. She seemed to have lost her influence over her mother, beginning to find that she had quite lost her old tractability. Poor Mrs. Poynder could no longer be depended upon to say what she was told to say, and was apt to break out into self-accusations and wailings over Jean's departure before people, hinting about some wrong done. Some subtle change was working in her mind, to which Maud did not find the key until too late.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### AT THE BRICES'.

JEAN made the most of the few hours' freedom she had gained. Selecting the most useful portion of her wardrobe, and such of her school-books as she was most likely to require, she packed them into the small trunk which had been her mother's. Then, putting on a dark hat and cloak, she watched her opportunity, locked her door on the outside, ran lightly down the back stairs, and slipped out into the night. She walked slowly in the direction of Raystone High Street, behind her veil anxiously scanning the faces she met. In a few minutes she came upon what she was looking for: a boy, whom she recognized as occasionally employed to run errands for the house, came whistling toward her. Telling him that he was required to go on an errand, and was to wait near the servants' entrance until she returned to him, she hurried back to the house again, contrived to bring down her trunk unobserved, and bade him take it to the railway station, and leave it at the luggage-office to be called for. Taking her to be one of the servants, and the errand an ordinary one (he had carried many a package to and from Fernside in the same way), the boy shouldered the trunk and set off for the railway station, too much interested in the mental disposal of his shilling to give a thought to any thing besides.

At half-past five o'clock the next morning, Jean crept down-stairs, softly unbolted the doors, let herself out of the quiet house, and walked quickly toward the railway station, carrying a hand-bag in which she had packed a few remaining necessities. Unnoticed by the people standing about in groups, mostly consisting of farmers going to attend the neighboring markets, she procured a ticket for the London terminus, claimed her trunk, took her seat in one of the carriages, and presently found herself gliding away from Raystone.

After a first hurried glance at her companions in the carriage, and to her great relief finding them to be strangers to her, she turned her eyes upon the town they were leaving behind. How different this from her arrival at Raystone, when, joyous and hopeful, she had peered eagerly out at the place that was to be her home! How much she had experienced since then of both pain and pleasure. What a lifetime she seemed to have lived during her eight months' sojourn there, and yet she knew that had she the power to blot them out of her remembrance she would not have done it. Though there had been sorrow, there had been so much happiness—enough to leaven a whole lifetime of pain. He had loved her, and, though her love for him had now to be like that of one for the dead, she had greater consolations than has

many a poor bereaved one. There was nothing in her dead past over which she was obliged to throw a veil. Looking back, with a prayer for his happiness, she made a solemn compact with herself that henceforth he must always be married to Maud in her thoughts—she must always think of him as Maud's husband.

In her utter inexperience, she had no fears about the future so far as earning her bread went, and no perception of any greater evil than her own to fight against. In happy ignorance of the world she challenged, she was even a little eager to try her strength in grappling with some difficulty. She was willing to work, and it did not for a moment occur to her that there might be some difficulty in finding work to do. Therefore, she experienced none of the heart-sinkings of many who, although as ready as herself to earn their bread, have found what the greatest difficulty is.

She had arranged her plan for getting away from Fernside easily enough. A few days previously, she had written to a poor woman at whose shop, situated in a small by-street near to Ivy Lodge, Miss Bowles's pupils occasionally bought sweets, asking if she could let her have a room for a short time, and had received a reply sufficiently affirmative to satisfy herself. Jean knew nothing of Mrs. Brice beyond the fact that she had a kind face. Indeed, she was setting forth to battle with the world armed with about as much knowledge of it as was the famous Don himself.

Her fellow-travelers recognized that she was not one of themselves, and left her undisturbed. What would their astonishment have been could they have known that the young, shy-looking girl, sitting passively there, her brown eyes dwelling gravely and calmly upon the scenes they sped by, was entering upon the field of life friendless and alone, to begin a struggle for her daily bread.

On arriving at the terminus, more conscious of her loneliness than she had yet been, Jean shrunk back into the friendly shelter of her corner with some indefinite idea of hiding herself; but at the reminder of one of the passengers, "Here we are, miss," she stepped out of the carriage and stood upon the platform, too bewildered by the novelty of her position and the noise and bustle around her to think of her trunk. The sight of other people's luggage being rapidly loaded on to cabs presently reminded her, and she summoned up courage to apply to a porter, shyly asking him if he would be kind enough to find her trunk and get a cab for her.

"Come this way and point it out, miss," he replied, very civilly, after a moment's glance at her flushed face. "This it! All right, miss." He procured a cab, very care-

fully hoisted her small trunk on to the top, and gave directions to the driver.

"What a kind man!" thought Jean. Then, taking out her purse as the porter was engaged in what appeared to be the somewhat difficult process of protecting her dress while closing the door, she asked,

"Is there any thing to pay?"

For answer, the door was unceremoniously banged to, and the man walked off, with a mental expletive not very complimentary to Jean. "Trying to catch a fellow in that way, with one of the directors standing close by! Well, I think I shall know your inner-cent face again!"

How long seemed the drive through the city to Jean! The cabman, apparently, did his best. He had inquired whether she wished to be driven fast, and appeared to make frantic efforts at progress. She did not notice that the greatest demonstrations took place when there was a block in the traffic, and that all his exertions were thrown away. But in course of time they proceeded westward, and at length arrived at her journey's end—a small crowded street on the Chelsea side of Fulham. Jean was not a little astonished at the man's charge, as much as her journey by rail.

"Ten shillings! Are you *quite* sure it's so much? Haven't you made a mistake?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"She's sharper than she looks," was his mental comment. But he volubly appealed to a group of children, hastily gathering about them, whether it was fair to be down upon a man like that after telling him to drive fast! "Did she think he was going to endanger his horse's life for nothing? There was the pore beast fit for nere another job that day all along of his trying to please her, and now she was a-trying to do a pore—"

"I did not think of the horse," said Jean, quite shocked. "And you ought not to have injured it to please me," she added, counting the money into his hand.

"All right, miss; I'll take perticeler keer on him for the rest of the day," returned the man, with a serious face; adding, as he shouldered her trunk and carried it into the shop, a mental wish that another such job might come in his way that instant minute, though two such could hardly be expected in one day.

A thin, careworn-looking woman, with an infant in her arms, was standing behind the counter serving a small customer, half a dozen other children crowding in to watch the process. She courtesied timidly to Jean, and called to some unseen Johnny to come and carry in the young lady's luggage.

"If you'll please to walk into the parlor, miss; I shall be done in a minute. Johnny!"

A preternaturally sharp-looking boy, about

twelve or thirteen years of age, emerged from a back room; and, as he came slowly forward with his hands in his pockets, Jean could not help noticing that his eyes fastened hungrily upon her purse.

"If you'll please follow Johnny into the parlor, miss, I'll be there directly, and show you the room as we lets; though it's very different to what you've been used to, you'll find it's sweet and clean."

Thanking her, and striving not to feel how forlorn and poor and small every thing seemed, Jean followed the boy through an opening in the counter to a back room. A dark man, of not very pleasing aspect, his eyes being too close together, his forehead too narrow, and his upper lip much too long, sat in his shirt-sleeves eating his dinner, and Jean noticed that all the meat to be seen was upon his plate.

"Do, miss?" speaking with his mouth full, and giving her a slight nod over his shoulder.

"You are Mr. Brice?" said Jean, involuntarily shrinking back a little.

"Yes, miss, he's my husband," said Mrs. Brice, entering at the moment.

"This is the young lady, Thomas." At a loss what to say or do next, she added, shyly, "Won't you take a seat, miss?"

"We don't charge no more for sitting," said Mr. Brice, which was intended for an agreeable jest, and received as such, with a nervous little laugh, by his wife. Thomas was in a good humor!

"I am sorry to intrude. Could not I go to the room I am to occupy?" said Jean, feeling terribly *de trop*, notwithstanding her hosts' courtesies.

"Oh no, miss, you couldn't sit there; it's such a bit of a room, and there's no fire-place. I told you it was small in my letter. We are only working-people, and the young men lodgers as lived with us always took their meals down here. I thought, when you wrote, that our place wasn't fit for such as you, miss, but you know you said—"

"Do not say another word about it," cheerfully put in Jean. "It is quite good enough for as long as I shall require it—only a few days, perhaps."

"You'll excuse me, miss," said Mr. Brice, "but if we let our room it must be taken from week to week, and money down beforehand. Nobody that wants to be fair can object to that."

"I do not object. What do you charge, Mrs. Brice?"

"Well, miss, we've mostly had three—"

"Six shillings a week is our charge," interrupted Mr. Brice, eying Jean's purse.

Quite relieved at the smallness of the sum—she had been in the wildest uncertainty as to what lodgings ought to cost, and, if Mr. Brice had only known it, would have been just as ready to pay ten as six—Jean laid down six shillings.

Mr. Brice gathered up the money, put on his coat, and lounged out through the shop.

"And if you wants any errands done, our Johnny will do 'em, and welcome, miss," said grateful Mrs. Brice, eager to add something on her side of the bargain. Six shillings a week was such a sum to pay! "Perhaps you would like a bit of something to eat now?"

In truth, Jean was beginning to feel terribly hungry, and acknowledged that she would be glad of something.

"A chop and a few potatoes, now?" said Mrs. Brice, whose worn face had brightened up wonderfully after her lord's departure, its very kindness appearing to have been timid of showing itself in his presence. "Johnny, come down, my lad," she called out, going to the foot of the stairs.

After a minute or two, the boy came slowly down, and stood near the door with his hands in his pockets, staring at Jean.

"Will you tell him what to get, please?" said Jean, putting some money into the other's hand.

"Go to the butcher's and ask Mr. Wild for a nice sixpenny chop, and then to the green-grocer's for a pound of potatoes, and on your way back call at the baker's for a penny loaf, and—"

"I carried her box upstairs," said Johnny, in a not too subdued voice for Jean's ears, eying her with an injured air.

"Oh, Johnny!" ejaculated Mrs. Brice, quite distressed.

But Johnny planted his back against the wall with a determined air.

Mrs. Brice went out into the shop, and beckoned pleadingly to him. But it required a great deal of beckoning, and only when Mrs. Brice held something up in her hand did Johnny move toward her. Jean could partly hear a discussion which seemed to be all persuasion on one side, and objection on the other.

"She give me nothing for carrying up her box."

"Come, Johnny, some of these bull's-eyes, now, your favorites."

"I ain't going to take three, when there's four a penny."

Before the desired number could be made up, it dawned upon Jean what was expected of her, and advancing into the shop she put sixpence down upon the counter before the boy.

"Is it for carrying up the box, miss?" he said, eying her sharply as he took up the money, and mentally speculated upon the possibility of opening a fresh account for the errands.

Jean nodded, and returned into the little parlor. Mrs. Brice slipped the bull's-eyes into the basket, with an entreating look at her son, who set off on his errand with a triumphant whistle. His mother went in to

prepare for her new lodger's meal. Placing the babe she carried into a washing-basket, which served for a cradle, in one corner of the room, and putting into its hands a lump of spotted china, which did alternate duty as a chimney ornament and plaything, and was supposed to bear some resemblance to a dog, she set cheerfully to work.

"But I hope I am not preventing your taking your own dinner, Mrs. Brice?" said Jean, as the other removed the empty plates, etc., and proceeded to spread a clean cloth upon half the table for her lodger.

"Oh no, don't never think about that, miss. I takes a bit now and then, when I want it, without regular sitting-down. What with the children, and the shop, and Thomas a-liking things tidy, there's no time."

"Your husband is gone to work, I suppose? What kind of work does he do?"

"Well, he is a carpenter by trade, miss, worse luck."

"Why, is work scarce, then?"

"No, 'tain't that, miss. Tom can't settle down to the carpentering. He feels as he ought to be in a different spear."

"Oh," dubiously replied Jean; "is he clever in some other way, then?"

"Wonderful! If such as him got into Parliament there wouldn't be any more poor people. It's grand to hear him talk about independence and all that! Such a head for figures, too! The men as belongs to the society a-working for freedom says none of them can talk like Tom. He makes it out all so clear that the rich people have no right to what they've got, and ought to be made share it with the poor. I do wish some of them as have got more than they can spend, could hear my Tom."

"Shop!" bawled out four or five small, shrill voices, to the accompaniment of sharp raps upon the counter. After three or four minutes, spent in lifting down first one bottle of sweets, and then another, for the approval of her small customers, Mrs. Brice returned to her tidying again.

"Have you much business, Mrs. Brice?"

"Well, no, miss; very little to count on. You see it's mostly farthing's-worths, and they takes such a time making up their minds. That's the pleasure of it, poor little dears! and I haven't the heart to hurry 'em."

"You must work very hard."

"I've got my hands full, for sure, miss; and on the heavy wash-days it do come rather hard. But I brings my tub into that corner, and gets along somehow. Ah, here's Johnny; there's a good lad, give miss the change."

He gave the basket to his mother, and then placed five pence on the table before Jean, waited a few moments, re-arranged them more symmetrically, which necessitated the leaving one by itself, and stood

looking at it. But Jean gathered the whole five up and put them into her pocket, at which he turned on his heel, and went whistling out again.

In a very short time Mrs. Brice had a comfortable meal prepared for Jean, who sat down quite hungry enough to appreciate it. Just as she commenced, two little girls, between seven and eight years old, rushed in from the National School, clamoring for dinner.

"Hush, Sissy! Susy, you know manners, I'm sure. This is the lady I told you about, and I know you'll be good and quiet, won't you, dears?"

Sissy and Susy sat down, pressing together like two birds on the small stool indicated by their mother, so promptly, obediently, as to give promise of the best of good behavior, and remained quietly examining the new-comer, keeping their eyes fixed upon her as they confided their opinions in whispers to each other. Mrs. Brice gave each a thick slice of bread and dripping, took a piece of bread-and-cheese herself, then sat down and proceeded to satisfy baby's hunger, which appeared sharpened by the sight of the others' banquet. Sissy and Susy measured their slices fairly together, pinched off little pieces all round, and exchanged them to make the division quite exact; then went comfortably on with their dinner. Mrs. Brice was congratulating herself upon her children's good behavior, whispering mother's talk to the baby at her breast, when suddenly the treacherous calm upon the stool gave way. Sissy's hands were buried in Susy's curly locks, and Susy's hands were busily employed in thumping Sissy, and both were screaming at the top of their voices.

"Are they hurt?" ejaculated Jean, unaccustomed to such a Babel. "What is the matter with them?"

Disturbed at its meal, baby was put screaming into its cradle, and the mother separated the combatants. "Oh, Susy, and you the oldest! What is it, Sissy? Tell mother."

Amidst angry ejaculations and sobs and sudden darts at each other, it was explained that they had amicably agreed to divide fairly between them whatever Jean might leave upon her plate. It appeared probable that a small piece of the end of the chop would be left, and sufficient on the bone to admit of picking. But, to their dismay, Jean calmly ate all that could be eaten, leaving nothing but the bare bone to be fought for. But she retrieved her character, and made peace by presenting each of the belligerents with a penny, which they set off to spend in the best of humors. Her heart ached for the poor mother, who with a distressed face entreated her to accept repayment of the twopence. Jean asked to see her room, and Mrs. Brice led the way to a small back room or

the second floor. It was small enough, there being only just sufficient space in it for a narrow bedstead, wash-stand, and one chair, upon which stood her trunk. But every thing looked clean; and, humble as it was, it was a shelter.

Mrs. Brice timidly ventured a question respecting her lodger's intentions for the future. It wasn't to be expected that she would stay there long. Jean explained that circumstances obliged her to earn her bread, and frankly sketched out her plans. "A lady who visited my aunt procured a governess by going to an agent, whose address I saw advertised, and she said it was the easiest thing in the world to do. I shall only have to go to the agent's office and put my name down in a book, then they will give me the addresses of ladies requiring governesses, and it's only to choose which I will go to."

"Well, it do seem easy, miss," said kind Mrs. Brice. "And the ladies have only got to see you; I'm sure any body would take to you at once."

"I hope they may," said Jean, a little doubtfully, as she remembered that the verdict of Miss Orme and two or three others of her aunt's friends had not been very favorable. She looked at her watch. "Just one o'clock; I might go to the agent's to-day. Is Oxford Street far from here, Mrs. Brice?"

"Too far for you to walk, perhaps, miss. But there's the omnibuses pass the bottom of the street every quarter of an hour, and the fare's only threepence."

Mrs. Brice descended to obey the summons of a chorus of small voices screaming "Shop!" and Jean proceeded to refresh her toilet.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### WITHOUT REFERENCES.

JEAN set forth with little Sissy for her guide to find an omnibus. Her first little difficulty was how to hail; but after one had passed, and her small companion had shown her how to make the necessary demonstration, she succeeded in attracting the conductor of the next. He jumped from his perch and ran to her side, but her polite inquiry whether his omnibus went to Oxford Street, and whether he could take her there, was received very impatiently.

"All right, miss; get in, and look sharp about it, please!" Adding, *sotto voce*, as he banged the door too, "I should have thought you could have seen that much for yourself. It's writ large enough. It's your mincing ones as keeps us behind time!"

Jean seated herself in a vacant place, and sat with downcast eyes and flushed cheeks, not a little nervous at her position. They

had rumbled on some distance, when a shabby-looking woman by her side touched her arm.

"Didn't you say you wanted to go to Oxford Street?"

"Yes," replied Jean.

"I don't know what part of it you want, but we are nearly half through. Shall I stop the conductor for you?" seeing that Jean looked puzzled what to do.

"If you please."

She watched the unceremonious process of thrusting an umbrella out and poking it into the man's back, and then, in obedience to his summons, "Now, then, miss," stumbled out and placed threepence in his hand. She stood a few minutes on the curb, bewildered and half frightened at her utter loneliness amidst the Babel of sound. At length she became aware that she was attracting attention; the eyes of many of the passers streaming by turned curiously upon her, and she walked on a few steps. Then she remembered that Mrs. Brice had told her to be sure not to ask her way of any one in the street, and went into a shop. Though the reply to her inquiry was not uncivil, it was very short and abrupt. "Third turning to the right," said a man, reaching something from a shelf, and not giving a look toward her.

How much haste every body seemed to be in, and how odd it seemed to be walking alone in the midst of such a number of people! What made them look at her so? Indeed, she was attracting some little attention by her evident strangeness to her position. Her slow, hesitating steps, her wide-opened, astonished eyes, her youth and freshness, the delicate, refined expression, so different from that of the ordinary street faces, drew attention toward her. She was glad to turn into the comparatively quiet street she was seeking, and then easily found the office. The hall door stood open, and while she stood hesitating what to do, she observed the words, "Miss Gilbert. Enter," on a swing-door to the right. Gathering up her courage, she pushed the door open, and entered a semi-official-looking room, part of which was partitioned off to form an inner office. As she stood hesitating what next to do, a pair of keen eyes were regarding her through the glass windows of the partition, and a kindly voice said,

"If you wish to see Miss Gilbert, will you come this way?"

Jean advanced, and found a quiet, business-like, and pleasant-looking gentlewoman seated at a desk.

"I am Miss Gilbert," she said, with a little bow. Then she left her visitor to explain her business in her own way, her quiet smile and kindly eyes inviting confidence.

Jean rose to the occasion now, and rapidly informed her hearer that she was seeking

a governess's situation where the children were not over twelve years of age.

"Salary no object; trained to teach; hard work not objected to," repeated after her Miss Gilbert. "You will not have much difficulty in procuring what you require, Miss Bell," she added, drawing a large book toward her, and dipping her pen in the ink. "Acquirements?"

"French and German good; music and drawing tolerable; good conduct— Oh, I was thinking of the marks at school!"

"Salary of no importance," wrote Miss Gilbert, smiling. "References?"

"I have no references," coolly replied Jean.

"No references!" more coolly replied the elder lady, eying the girl through her glasses. "You are not serious, Miss Bell?"

"Does it matter so very much?" asked Jean, faintly.

"Do you think that any lady would take a governess into her family without knowing something of her antecedents?"

"I—I thought they might believe me," faltered Jean. "I should believe others."

"Unfortunately, people are not always to be trusted in their estimation of themselves, Miss Bell," a little stiffly replied Miss Gilbert.

"I should not tell any one that I am very good. I know that I am not. I have tempers and things, but I never told a lie; and I know what I say I do, and would try to teach it well."

Woman of business as she was, and quite unaccustomed to trust to appearances, Miss Gilbert was a little at loss now. In all her experience she had never met any one like Jean. But her experience had been a very hardening one; she had been brought into contact with too many doubtful people to yield to a momentary impulse in favor of a stranger or lose sight of business. So she replied, in her hardest business tone,

"I have no objection to put your name on my books, Miss Bell, and the preliminary fee is five shillings. But"—as Jean proceeded to take that sum from her purse—"I am bound to tell you that I fear your chance of getting a good engagement is exceedingly small."

"I do not expect any thing very good," said Jean.

Miss Gilbert glanced at the girl's expensive mourning. "Pardon me, Miss Bell. Am I right in the supposition that you find yourself suddenly left unprotected—a parent?"

"My father, Miss Gilbert."

"And you find yourself obliged to go out into the world, not previously expecting you would have to do so?"

"No, I was educated to be a governess from the beginning, only papa altered his mind and intended to leave me his money."

"And altered it again?"

"The property is my aunt's now. I have nothing."

"It seems very unjust to leave it away from his own child."

Jean reflected a moment. Here was an opportunity for trying what effect the knowledge of her birth would have upon a stranger.

"He was not married to my mother," she said, curiously noting the effect of her words upon the other.

"Oh!" gravely ejaculated Miss Gilbert.

"Do you think it makes any real difference in me?" broke forth Jean. "People never know till I tell them."

"Then I very decidedly advise you *not* to tell them, Miss Bell," which was Jean's first lesson in expediency, had she been ready to learn.

A carriage stopped at the door, and in a few moments a fashionably attired, faded-looking woman entered the office. Jean drew back.

"Good-morning, Miss Gilbert. You are surprised to see me so soon again, I dare say. Mademoiselle left me in the most unhand-some way this morning, at a moment's notice, because I insisted that it was part of her duty to fill up her spare time in helping nurse with the mending, hair-curling, and so forth!"

"You are certainly very unfortunate in your selection, Mrs. Chetwynd."

"Such a horrid set of people to deal with, you know. I almost think I will try an English one this time. Of the two evils—" Her eyes lighted upon Jean, and she put up her eyeglass for better inspection. After a few minutes' scrutiny, she dropped it, and turned to Miss Gilbert again. "Pray do not send me any pretty people. We make a point of having good-looking men-servants, and there might be all sorts of complications. Plain, middle-aged, without crotchets, and willing to be useful in the nursery. You know what I require, and I shall depend upon you sending me a suitable person. Good-morning, Miss Gilbert." And, with a parting stare at Jean, Mrs. Chetwynd rustled out of the room.

Miss Gilbert was inscribing her name and requirements upon the books, and Jean was waiting until she had finished to take leave, when some one tapped at the outer door and pushed it open. A simply dressed, refined-looking woman of about thirty-five years of age, whose earnest face wore a troubled expression, entered the office.

"Good-morning, Miss Gilbert. Are you disengaged? I have come to you for assistance again. I am very sorry to say the young lady you sent me can not make herself at home with us. You know the General and myself are very anxious that our girls should have the advantage of associating with a gentlewoman. But Miss Benson and I have such very opposite ideas as

to the meaning of the term. Every one in the house treats the governess as a gentlewoman, and my girls pay her the same respect which they see their mother does. But really Miss Benson is a little too exacting on the score of birth and former position. She can not even make allowance for our having only one close carriage." With a little smile she went on: "You know it was not merely birth or position which was my *sine quâ non*, but the society of a good and well-bred woman for my children, and I really can not understand any gentlewoman being so sensitive about position as is Miss Benson."

"I am sure Miss Benson must be very difficult to please, Lady Dacre."

"Well, we really have done our best, from papa to baby, in the way of conciliating; but it has been of no use, and I must confess that it was not a very severe blow to us when Miss Benson this morning gave notice, in consequence of having overheard some allusion which she considered disrespectful to herself from one of the men-servants. He would have been dismissed at once had there been any grounds for the complaint. But when the matter was inquired into, it turned out that, though he had behaved rudely, she had more than brought it upon herself by her unlady-like treatment of him."

"I hope you will be more successful next time, Lady Dacre."

"Indeed I trust so. I am so very anxious about my girls." She caught sight of Jean. "I beg your pardon, I did not perceive that you were engaged, Miss Gilbert. In half an hour, perhaps. I have to call in Vere Street, and can come again."

"Oh no!" said Jean, hastily rising to take her departure.

"This young lady is seeking an engagement," a little doubtfully began Miss Gilbert.

"Are you?" said Lady Dacre, turning toward Jean with a pleasant smile and bow.

"Miss Bell—Lady Dacre," said Miss Gilbert, in reluctant reply to the new-comer's inquiring look toward her.

"Will you kindly tell me what kind of an engagement you wish to make, and what subjects you undertake, Miss Bell?"

Jean ran through her list, her eyes anxiously fastened upon the gentle gray ones turned so kindly upon her.

"And been regularly trained to teach? That makes it come so much easier to you, does it not? I shall indeed be fortunate if we can make an arrangement. I am like my children about first impressions. My eldest girl is ten years old, and there are two others, eight and six, but the youngest would only be playing at lessons yet, you know, and I have two good nurses."

"I like work, Lady Dacre."

"And play, too, I hope. We shall test your capabilities in that way too, I assure

you." Then more diffidently she went into the business question. "We usually offer sixty pounds a year, Miss Bell; but the money question there would be no difficulty about. My husband and I feel that is quite a secondary consideration in comparison with getting the right lady to come to us."

Jean listened with flushed cheeks and delighted eyes. Here at once was the very thing—a thousand times better than she had dared to hope for!

"Will you name a time, and come and spend a long day with us at Wimbledon, Miss Bell? I shall be so very glad if you feel that you can make ours your home, and it is much better for you to see us as we are before deciding, is it not?"

"I am sure I should be happy to—" impulsively began Jean.

"I think it may be as well to inform Lady Dacre that there is a little irregularity in the way of reference," put in Miss Gilbert.

"Irregularity?" echoed Lady Dacre, looking at Jean.

"I haven't any."

"No reference! But—you mean that you have not accepted an engagement before?"

"I have no one to refer you to about me in any way," said Jean.

Lady Dacre turned inquiringly toward Miss Gilbert, but that lady was bending over her ledger, and left Jean to speak for herself.

"Does it make very much difference?" said Jean, with a sinking heart.

"I am very, very sorry," returned Lady Dacre, with a disappointed look; "but we ought, I think, to have some kind of reference—unless, perhaps, you have had some disagreement with your family, and would not mind confiding in me?"

Jean reflected a moment. No, it could not be called a disagreement. There had been no quarrel. So she replied, in Jean fashion, "I left my aunt's house because—something occurred which made them not like me so well afterward, and—I thought I should prefer working to living upon them."

"I beg your pardon. I feel so interested in you—indeed, I am not asking from mere curiosity. Can you tell me, in confidence, what it was that occurred, Miss Bell?"

"There were two things. One was—I would rather not tell that," said Jean, remembering Miss Gilbert's warning.

"And the other, Miss Bell?"

"I loved—some one—I ought not."

"Really!" ejaculated Miss Gilbert, quite out of patience.

"A gentleman?" hesitatingly asked Lady Dacre.

"Yes," replied Jean, in a low voice, a hot blush dyeing her downcast face.

"I am very sorry. You are very open—but—that—does make a difference," said Lady Dacre, with her eyes full of tears. Though the confession she had extracted seemed so much worse than any thing she had expected, she was deeply touched by the girl's frankness, and her tender, womanly heart still yearned toward one so young and beautiful and friendless. She was almost a child, and had not even now lost the look of purity and innocence. Then, however much she might have erred, she seemed so anxious to begin afresh. Would a happy wife and mother be justified in passing her by without offering a helping hand? Ah, no! not in Ellen Dacre's estimation. Though her girls must be guarded from companionship with one whose antecedents appeared doubtful from a moral point of view, she would not hold herself excused if she did not do any thing and every thing in her power to help a weaker sister. So she went on, gently,

"I am afraid we can not come to any arrangement, Miss Bell; but I may be able to be of some service to you as a friend. If you will let me, I will do my best to serve you. Do believe I am sincere, and say you will come and see me, when we could talk over your future plans. Come to this address, and let me be your friend"—offering Jean a card.

But Jean had noted her involuntary look of dismay at the communication that had been made, and although she did not understand its full import, she saw that the impression was very seriously against her, and shrunk shyly and a little proudly from the offer. A time might arrive when she would be glad to seize a less advantageous opportunity than this for making a friend; but it had not come yet. Lady Dacre said a few words to Miss Gilbert respecting the kind of lady she required for her children, then turned and offered her hand to Jean, with a murmured hope that she would do well, and bade her good-bye.

"I am very sorry you were unsuccessful, Miss Bell," stiffly said Miss Gilbert. "Lady Dacre is such an exceptionally advantageous person to deal with. But if you put matters before people in so very unfavorable a light, I really do not see how you can expect—" Remembering that, after all, Jean had a right to expect something for her five shillings, and in truth not for one moment believing, as less experienced Lady Dacre had done, that the girl had really any thing to be ashamed of, she added, "We must hope for the best. People who do not give such high salaries are not so particular, although I advise you not to refer to love matters again."

"I will not again, Miss Gilbert."

"And come in the morning for the future, Miss Bell; our best time is between eleven and two o'clock."

Jean took leave, and went out into the street again with a heavy heart. It did not appear so very easy to get a situation, after all. Lady Dacre had confessed that she was prepossessed in her favor, and was manifestly sorry to be obliged to decline making an engagement with her, and yet how terribly decided she had been! But Jean's nature was a too elastic one to succumb for any length of time. She was soon comforting herself with the reflection that Miss Gilbert had said people who did not give high salaries were not so particular. She did not want a high salary. She would take a very small one, and put up with any thing until she had overcome the difficulty about reference. To think of that difficulty never having occurred to her! Poor Jean, it was fortunate for her that her difficulties grew gradually upon her; had she seen them all at once it might have been more than even she could have had the courage to face.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### UNDER-CURRENTS.

It was quite dusk when Jean at length found her way back to the Brices' humble abode. It looked humble enough, not to say desolate, now; a tallow-candle, burning feebly in the shop window, imparting to it a more dreary aspect than total darkness. The heterogeneous collection of penny toys, sweets, cheap cotton, etc., etc., exposed for sale, was not very attractive in the best light, but it looked miserably poor in this.

"Please to walk in, miss," said Mrs. Brice, when she saw who it was tapping on the counter.

She was sitting, neat and clean, at needle-work, mending the day's dilapidations in a heap of children's clothes on the table before her. This was her time of rest, she told Jean, as the latter sat wearily down by the fire opposite to her, and loosened her cloak. Sissy and Susy were in bed, and baby was mostly quiet of an evening, and would miss kindly excuse Johnny's bed? She need not have let it down so early, to be sure (it represented a chest of drawers by day), for he was gone to the theatre. "Johnny mostly did when he got a sixpence," sighed the poor mother. After a while she grew conscious that her lodger had returned more depressed than she had set forth, and intruded no more family details.

Jean soon explained the cause of her abstraction. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to tell out her troubles to Mrs. Brice, who had such a large stock of love and sympathy on hand, although—or because—she was always spending it. She soon contrived to give a little *couleur de rose*



to the picture. "Why, lor, it wouldn't never do to be cast down so soon. Something will be sure to turn up—never fear about that, miss—for a beautiful young lady like you, as knows 'complishments'—accomplishments being a great saving power in Mrs. Brice's estimation. She did not believe that Jean would have to play at work long. "Once among her own class, lovers would be coming about her like flies round sugar, and she'd soon be riding in her own carriage, with nothing to do but be happy, God bless her!" thought the good woman, who was fast falling in love with Jean herself. Then it occurred to her that there might be another cause besides disappointment to make her lodger look so fagged, and she suggested supper. Jean was fain to acknowledge that she was beginning to feel very hungry again. "But I do not like troubling you so much, Mrs. Brice."

"Lor, don't never think as it's any trouble, and you so kind, too! I must be a-doing something, you know, miss, and it's my bounden duty to get you what you want. I can easy run out and get what is wanted now, if you'll kindly give a eye to the shop for me, and tell any one as comes in to wait a bit. Though it ain't likely that any body will come at this time, unless some little one can't be got to bed without sugar-plums."

Jean had finished her penny roll at dinner, and more bread had to be fetched, with a mite of cheese and some butter, and then she insisted upon her kind friend sitting down and sharing the meal with her, with the addition of half a pint of ale. But how fast the money seemed to melt away, she thought, reckoning up the expenses of the day as she sat on the edge of her small bedstead when she had retired for the night, leaving Mrs. Brice sitting up for her husband and son. The cost of each separate thing had seemed so little, and yet the total frightened her. But she recollected that the railway journey and cab hire would not have to be paid on the morrow, and was, besides, too heartily tired to be kept awake by anxiety. She fell asleep with a prayer on her lips, and slept as peacefully as though her future path were strewn with flowers.

She was awakened the next morning by the whisperings of Sissy and Susy outside her room door, and sprung up, looking about her with bewildered eyes at her new surroundings. Then she proceeded to dress in her simple dainty fashion: though she knew of no other aids to the toilet besides soap and water, and brushes, she was more daintily particular in her use of them than is many a modern belle, and if her soft brown hair was too simply arranged for the fashion, it admirably suited her style of face. She entered the little parlor down-stairs looking, as Mrs. Brice thought, fresh as a rose. The latter was busily engaged in pre-

paring Sissy and Susy for school, while gently striving to impress the advisability of doing something upon her first-born, Johnny, who sat in the window-seat swinging his legs, and eying the table upon which was placed Jean's modest breakfast.

Of all Mrs. Brice's troubles, Johnny was the greatest. Her persuasive arguments notwithstanding, Johnny very much preferred idleness to work. She had succeeded in getting him several situations at shops in the neighborhood; but he had given them up after a very short trial, and returned upon her hands again. She was now endeavoring to persuade him to make one more attempt, having heard that an errand-boy was required at a grocer's in the road; drawing what she considered to be a very attractive picture of the great things that such a step in life might lead to. He might in time be taken to help behind the counter and learn the trade, and some day have a shop of his own, with a horse and cart and all sorts of grandeur, if he would only begin with a will. "Think of mother coming and asking for two ounces of tea, 'if you please, sir,' only it needn't be 'sir,' then, need it, Johnny?"

To all of which he listened with a supercilious smile. For Johnny had seen a much more attractive picture the night before—a much easier and quicker method of getting a fortune than by working for it.

If the hero of the night before had been content to be a grocer's errand-boy, he would never have attained the eminence he had. How completely Johnny's sympathy, and indeed the sympathy of the audience generally, had been with the dashing "Claude," whose necessities forced him to borrow other people's money. How gracefully he had done it always; how picturesque were his language and attire, and what courtesy he displayed to the fair sex! How high was his sense of honor, too, and how generous he was to the poor! What a pretty sentiment that was about the necessity for a better distribution of wealth, and the harmlessness of taking from the rich to give to the poor. Then the moral climax; when, having won the affections of the lovely Clarissa, with a hundred thousand pounds and her father's blessing, the gallant hero stepped forward and made an affecting speech about his intention to reform, settle down as a country squire, and lead a virtuous, contented life with his adored Clarissa; having arrived at the conclusion that "virtue, and virtue alone, was happiness beyond."

All present felt that morality had been upheld, and departed with a glow of sympathy for the hero; every boy wishing himself a Claude, and every girl wishing herself a Clarissa.

"I should like mother to have seen that!" thought Johnny, as he trudged homeward, cold, hungry, and discontented. "It's all

very well her a-talking about work. Father knows better. What right have them rich folks to be doing nothing but pleasuring from morning till night, while poor people's got to work like slaves for ever such a little?"

"Go up and see whether father will have another cup of tea, there's a good lad," said his mother, anxious to get him out of the way. She went on to explain that her husband had been out late at some meeting the night before, and was taking his breakfast in bed.

Notwithstanding Mrs. Brice's unceasing care, her little home looked very forlorn by daylight. Jean noticed the leaf of the table hanging by one hinge; the paper pasted over the broken windows; the threadbare scraps of carpet, and general air of poverty, cleanliness alone preserving the place from utter desolation.

"I thought you said your husband was a carpenter?" presently said Jean, observing Mrs. Brice's rather complicated method of propping up one of the chairs with part of a broom handle stuck in a bottle to support her washing-tub.

"Yes; so he is, miss," replied Mrs. Brice.

Jean was prevented further comment by the entrance of Mrs. Brice's lord and master. He seated himself by the fire with a smile that was meant to be very pleasant and friendly, as he wished her good-morning.

"Don't you disturb yourself on account of me, miss; this is always my side."

But Jean was eager to make her escape. It seemed a thousand times preferable to be in her tiny close room, than in Mr. Brice's parlor when he was present. She busied herself in making her bed, and putting things neat to spare Mrs. Brice; then dressed, and set out for the agent's again. This time she decided to walk, and save the omnibus hire. With some difficulty (she felt so shy of asking people to direct her) she found her way to Miss Gilbert's.

Five or six ladies of different ages, though none so young as herself, were waiting in the outer office, and looked a little curiously at her as she entered.

"Miss Gilbert is engaged with some one just now," said a quiet, refined, but depressed-looking middle-aged woman, moving aside to show Jean there was a vacant seat next to her, and going on with a kindly smile to make some reference to the fineness of the morning, as she observed the young girl's diffidence. "I do not think I have met you here before?"

"No," said Jean; "I only applied to Miss Gilbert yesterday."

"I hope you may be more fortunate than I. I have been here regularly every morning the last six weeks."

"Are there so few applications for governesses, then?" asked Jean, with a sinking heart.

"No; very many. People complain that they have just as much difficulty in getting suited with governesses as we do in finding employment."

"I do not understand."

"All governesses are not really efficient, and those that are do not always meet the kind of people who appreciate them. It's the old story of the square pegs and round holes, you know. It is becoming a constant complaint that governesses undertake to teach a great deal more than they have any thing like a thorough knowledge of, and it is doubtless true enough; but it is a natural consequence of such a vast range of subjects being insisted upon. To command a good salary in these days, a governess is not only expected to have solid knowledge, which it would have taken all her time to acquire, but she must also be able to finish, as it is called, in all the newest styles of harp and piano playing, singing, drawing, painting, and so forth; to be proficient in any of which she must have had some special talent, as well as long practice. To meet the demand, young ladies are found with a smattering of it all, and the complaint is kept up that there is an increasing difficulty in finding efficient governesses. I had the advantage of a really solid education from my father, who was a good classic and mathematician, and I used to help him with his pupils in rather advanced work; but I find myself passed over because I am not artist enough to conscientiously undertake more than drawing lessons, and do not teach singing. I was yesterday offered ten pounds a year, and this in an age when there is such an outcry about the better education of women. Until mothers have the sense and courage to leave out of their daughters' education such accomplishments as they have no talent for, and devote the time at present wasted to whatever special aptitude they may have (the stupidest pupils I have known had some kind of specialty), we shall never have well-educated women. If the talents girls possess were carefully trained, we should have more individuality among women; each would have her strong point, and be as little ashamed of acknowledging that she had no specialty for certain others as is a man. A mathematician does not lose standing by not being a classic, or *vice versa*. Pardon me, I ought not to trouble you with all this. I am afraid I am getting quite soured and selfish."

"Indeed I am not surprised at your feeling the injustice," said Jean, adding, with a sigh, "but I should be very glad to get an offer of even ten pounds a year and a home."

"I am sorry to hear that—sorry for what it implies, you know. You have evidently so little experience of life, and are so unfit to battle with the kind of people you are likely to meet. The kind of women who

offer a governess ten pounds a year are not always, as you might suppose, poor gentlewomen."

An idea suddenly occurred to Jean, and she said, with a bright smile, "I am so glad! You will, I think, have the offer of something better than you expect this morning. It has just occurred to me that the very one to appreciate you was here yesterday; she was so good and kind, and seemed to want just such a gentlewoman as yourself. Her name is Dacre, and she lives at—

"I am afraid I must not take advantage of your information. You are very kind to think of it, but it is against Miss Gilbert's rules to pass on introductions."

"But she will tell you herself," impulsively began Jean. "You are just exactly what Lady Dacre is seeking for; indeed you are!"

The other smiled, not hopefully, but at the young girl's enthusiasm. "I sometimes think that people who 'exactly' suit each other do not happen to get introduced—it would not increase business. But do not attach any value to my words. I am a disappointed woman, you know, and disappointed people are apt to be cynical in their judgments. Do not let me destroy your faith. I would give a great deal to be able to believe as much as you do at this moment."

A young lady emerged from Miss Gilbert's inner room, and stopped a moment before Jean's companion on her way out of the office.

"Our ten-pounds-a-year friend, again!" she laughingly said; "I could not induce Miss Gilbert to give me her address, because I fancy she guessed what I wanted to do. I really should enjoy giving that woman my opinion of her magnificence."

"Will you step this way, Miss Bell?" said Miss Gilbert, coming for a moment to the door of the inner room.

Jean bowed to the lady she had been talking to, and obeyed Miss Gilbert's summons.

"You said yesterday that salary was no object with you, Miss Bell?" said Miss Gilbert, smoothing out a be-scented and crested rose-colored note upon the desk before her. "If you would accept a small one, I can give you the address of a lady on my books who might make an engagement with you. As she offers only a small remuneration, she may not be so *exigente* as many people on the score of reference, you know."

Jean expressed herself ready to take advantage of the introduction; although a little less enthusiastically than she would have done an hour previously. Miss Gilbert gave her an address at Brompton, and, in reply to her timid inquiry as to the best means of getting there, gave her the welcome intelligence that it was close to her own abode.

"I hope it is something worth your ac-

ceptance, and that you will obtain it," kindly said the lady she had been talking to, as Jean passed out.

"You are very kind. I am sure I hope you too will be fortunate," returned Jean, gratefully.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### NINE POUNDS A YEAR.

ON her way down the street Jean's attention was arrested by a crowd of people. They were gathered about a Punch-and-Judy show. She paused a moment on her way past, and in a very short time was gazing at it with as much enjoyment as the veriest child there. Entirely forgetting where she was, she threw up her veil, and, with the soft, rosy flush of excitement in her face, laughed merrily out with the crowd.

The performance over, she recollected where she was, drew down her veil, and hurried on. She made her way through Hyde Park, and on as far as Knightsbridge; then began to make inquiries for "Elysium Villa." She happened to ask at a baker's shop where dwelt the Mrs. Tweedie she was seeking, and received so plain a direction that she had no difficulty in finding that lady's pretentious abode. "The house with the vultures at the gates, lions on the door-steps, and statues in the front garden," was easily perceived at some distance.

"Perhaps Mr. Tweedie sells this kind of thing," thought Jean, as she entered at the gate, passed by the vultures, etc., and rang the door-bell. "Yes, Mrs. Tweedie was at home," said a small boy in page's attire, who opened the door. After admitting her into the hall, he stood hesitating a moment or two, eying her sharply, and calculating probabilities as to her position in society. It was all very well to tell him that he ought to be able to distinguish between common people and gentlefolk; James did not find it so easy. However, he now came to the conclusion that if his mistress was a lady, Jean certainly couldn't be one, and left her standing in the hall, while he carried her card into a side room.

Jean heard a deep voice give the order, "Drawing-room, James." The boy quickly returned, and with a bow asked her to follow him. Jean looked round the room she was ushered into with astonished eyes. Never had she seen so gorgeous a room as this—its gilding, yellow satin upholstery, great pier-glasses, blue and crimson carpets, and brilliant-hued vases, all so oppressively new and obtrusively expensive. What a contrast this to the Grange and Fernside drawing-rooms!

A lady, whose appearance conveyed somewhat the same impression as her room, with a high bald forehead, small sharp black eyes,

large Roman nose, and very expansive figure, entered the room, bearing Jean's card in her hand.

"From Miss Gilbert," she said, reading the line Jean had written to that effect upon her card. "I hope she has not made a mistake this time. The last young lady she sent was quite unsuitable. You appear very young to take charge of five pupils. Will you let me know what you undertake to teach, Miss Bell?"

Jean ran through her list of subjects, Mrs. Tweedie checking each qualification off upon fat fingers. "Not Italian nor singing?"

"No."

"That is unfortunate, and French and German not acquired abroad, I suppose?"

"No, only at school, Mrs. Tweedie."

"In that case you could not expect—I presume Miss Gilbert informed you that I do not give a large salary in addition to a comfortable home?"

"Yes, she told me that; but as I can offer no reference, I should be content to accept small remuneration," returned Jean, striving to believe in the possibility of finding a comfortable home at Elysium Villa.

"No reference!" ejaculated Mrs. Tweedie, trying to look very shocked. "That is certainly a very serious drawback." In her heart of hearts she was not very seriously affected by the intelligence; taught by experience that ten pounds a year did not command absolute perfection. She had found the principal defect in the young ladies she had previously engaged to be inability to teach. If Jean was efficient as a teacher, it would only be to look sharply after her between whiles, keeping her to the school-room, and leaving the children to watch her. She must be clever, indeed, to hoodwink Cecilia Ann. "No," summed up Mrs. Tweedie rapidly in her mind; "she couldn't carry off the tables and chairs, and there'll be nothing else for her to take; people don't send up silver spoons to governesses. But of course she was not going to let Jean see that her want of reference was of no moment in comparison with her ability to teach. Besides, it gave Mrs. Tweedie the opportunity for bargaining, and making bargains was the delight of her soul. Was not every thing most precious to her among her gorgeous surroundings, a sort of trophy which had been carried off after a sharp skirmish with the brokers at a sale? So she repeated, as solemnly as she could, "A very serious drawback, indeed; and if I entertain the idea of engaging you under such circumstances, you could not of course expect more than a nominal salary—say eight pounds a year or so?"

"I—shouldn't mind about the money," said Jean, forlornly.

"And there must be a regular agreement drawn up between us, you know," said Mrs.

Tweedie, good-humoredly; indeed, with a contraction of one eyelid which almost approached a wink. "Say for three years in the event of your suiting. It would never do to have you staying only long enough to get a character."

Jean remained silent, and the lady went on, "I suppose you would have no objection to my eldest son asking you a few questions in French and German, and cætera, Miss Bell?" Adding, with a *déagé* air, "I am ashamed to say I have almost forgotten mine."

"No; I should not mind that—only—I would rather decline your offer, Mrs. Tweedie," said Jean, feeling immensely relieved when the words were spoken.

"Decline! You can not be serious, Miss Bell? Without a character!"

She eyed the young girl, who had risen from her seat as she spoke, from head to foot. "I wish Cecilia Ann would rise like that," she thought, "instead of bouncing so;" then went on to Jean a little coaxingly,

"Well; suppose we say nine pound, and your washing?"

"I was not thinking of the money," said Jean.

"Not the money!" echoed Mrs. Tweedie, quite fascinated, and all the more anxious to complete the bargain, as the other drew back. "What is it, then?"

"I—can not tell you. Good-morning, Mrs. Tweedie; I am sorry to have troubled you."

"But I beg and insist that you will tell me, Miss—Miss what's-your-name. Do you suppose that I am to be played with?" said Mrs. Tweedie, very determinedly standing before Jean.

"I do not think I should suit you," murmured poor Jean, looking round at Mrs. Tweedie's grandeur.

"I do not understand you."

"Will you allow me to say good-morning, Mrs. Tweedie?" pleaded Jean.

"Not until you have told me why you think you should not suit. What can you object to, I should like to know?"

"Every thing," said Jean, losing her patience.

"Well, to be sure! Every thing, indeed! including myself, I suppose?"

"I did not want to say it," blundered poor Jean.

Mrs. Tweedie rang the bell violently, and called out, "The door, James!" adding also, for the boy's ears, "I hope Miss Gilbert will send some one respectable next time!"

"There!" thought James. "Don't say it's my fault this time. You told me to take her into the drawing-room yourself!"

"She would make me!" thought Jean, turning away from the Vultures with a sigh of relief, and walking slowly homeward. "I'm sure I did not want to tell her; but it

was quite true. Mrs. Brice is a thousand times more like a lady. I would rather live with Mrs. Brice forever!" But the thought forced itself upon her that living with Mrs. Brice would only be possible so long as her money lasted. Her heart sunk, and she began to tell herself that perhaps she ought to have tried to live with Mrs. Tweedie. "I am afraid I ought to have tried; Miss Gilbert said that I could not expect much of an offer. But it was not the smallness of the salary I minded; and there can't be many people like Mrs. Tweedie—impossible! I never saw any one like her before. And I will take the very next offer I get, whatever it may happen to be."

She arrived at her humble home, tired, depressed, and terribly hungry. "So unfortunate," she thought, "my being such a hungry girl when eating costs so much!"

While her kind friend was frying a piece of steak, which she had run out and fetched herself, to spare Jean the paying her boy to do, the girl told about her disappointment.

"I have been to see one lady (Miss Gilbert called her a lady), but I declined her, and she was so cross about it, Mrs. Brice."

"Don't never be down-hearted about it, miss. Something better will turn up soon, never fear. It's something to get a chance of declining, you know, ever so much better than getting no offer at all," cheerily returned Mrs. Brice; "don't let it spoil your appetite."

"I do believe nothing would spoil that," dolefully replied Jean.

Afterward, having the rest of the day upon her hands—she could not go to Miss Gilbert's until the next morning—Jean put on a washing-dress, and asked Mrs. Brice to let her help with the mending work, or what not. After a little protesting, Mrs. Brice yielded, and Jean was soon stitching away at a frock for baby. Moreover, she found a fairy story for Sissy and Susy when they roamed restlessly in and out, not knowing how to spend their half-holiday, now that a sharp shower prevented their receiving a party on the door-steps. They brought their stool to Jean's feet, and sat nestling together on it, devouring her with their eyes.

"Well," said Sissy, after deliberating with Susy over the *dénouement*, "I wouldn't have minded being good to get all that; would you, Susy? If a fairy came and asked me to give her a jug of water, I'd fetch it for her for less than that girl did, and run all the way to the pump, too!"

"Ah, but she thought she wasn't agoing to get any thing for doing it, Sissy. She didn't know the fairy was going to give her all them beautiful things. She thought she was doing it for nothing, didn't she, Miss Bell?"

"Yes, of course it wouldn't have been kind else, you know, Susy. All the beauti-

ful gifts were for being kind, not for the jug of water."

"Nobody does things for nothing!" very decidedly opined Sissy.

"I think you know some one who does good because she loves doing it, without thought of reward?" gently said Jean.

"No, we don't!" promptly and decisively.

"Think again."

In a moment or two Susy clapped her hands, and exclaimed, with a beaming face, "Oh yes, I do. You means mother, Miss Bell. Mother had little Billy Jones here a whole month when his mother had the fever!"

"Mother sits up with the people when they are ill," exclaimed Sissy.

"Mother gived her share of Christmas dinner to little Lizzie Day!"

"Mother never beats us like Jane Mills's mother beats her, and mother never scolds back at father!" said Sissy.

"And," finished up Susy, "mother's good when people don't know, and never gets nothing for it; so she must like being good, don't you, mother?"

"I wish I had a mother to love," said Jean.

Sissy's and Susy's eyes were turned upon their mother with a new expression in them. Mrs. Brice's head was bent low over her washing-tub, into which her tears were falling fast. But they were soon brushed away, and she was busily preparing tea. Susy sat with her elbows in her lap, and her chin in her hands, gazing meditatively into the fire, until baby's cry rang through the room. Then she started up and went to the cradle.

"I'll keep her quiet, mother."

And Susy stood bravely at her post, rocking the cradle, though Sissy came peeping in at the door, making all sorts of signals to draw her away.

"I do believe you like doing it for mother?" said Jean.

"Yes," replied Susy, turning her eyes away from the temptation at the door to her mother's face.

That half-hour at tea with Jean—the latter insisted upon their taking it together—was the happiest Mrs. Brice had experienced for many a long day. A little sunshine had begun to find its way into her colorless life. But presently Thomas Brice came in, and, notwithstanding his protest, meant to be very polite, against her departure, Jean murmured something about having work to do upstairs, and went to her room.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THOMAS BRICE'S TACTICS.

JEAN found it rather dull sitting on the edge of her tiny bed mending her gloves (the rest of her small wardrobe was as yet

too new to require repair) by the light of a small tallow-candle. Then, with such little occupation for her thoughts, she found it so difficult to prevent them straying to Maud's husband. "Maud's husband," she repeated, again and again, with her lips, while her rebellious heart would only whisper another name. But she tried hard to force her thoughts into another channel, to think upon her interview with Mrs. Tweedie. Had she been right in acting according to her impressions against that lady? Was it right to refuse nine pounds a year, with food and shelter, from *any one* in her present circumstances?

Then she counted her small store of money, and made a list of her expenses, which did not raise her spirits. Fifteen pounds had seemed such a fortune to begin the world with; but how rapidly it was diminishing—how quickly a sovereign melted away!

She lay down to rest more weary and depressed than she had hitherto felt. But she slept the healthy, dreamless sleep of a child, and arose to begin the next day with recovered spirits.

Miss Gilbert was rather stiff and distant in her bearing, when she found time to accord a few words to Jean, after the latter had waited in the office nearly three hours.

"Nothing that is likely to suit you in this morning's correspondence, Miss Bell." After a moment or two employed in turning over some letters, she added, "I was a great deal surprised, as well as disappointed, to receive Mrs. Tweedie's account of your interview with her, Miss Bell. I thought you were desirous to make an engagement, and, under the circumstances, willing to put up with a few disadvantages in the outset. In any case, I did not expect to hear that you were capable of trying to give offense. I expect the young ladies I introduce to behave with courtesy."

"I did not want to be discourteous, Miss Gilbert," murmured Jean; "but Mrs. Tweedie was so big, and would not let me go away until I had told her why; and when she asked if it was herself as well as all the rest that I objected to, I could not have said No, for that would not have been true. She was so dreadful, Miss Gilbert! I never saw any lady like Mrs. Tweedie."

"When you have gained some experience, you will be wiser, I hope, Miss Bell; but I am afraid you will have to pay rather dearly for enlightenment. People who have their way to make in the world can not always associate with only the most refined, and certainly can not afford to give offense by allowing their exact opinions of others to be too apparent. Indeed, I do not consider it a proof of the best breeding to be too—" Miss Gilbert hesitated; but could not at the moment find another word than "candid" to express her meaning.

Jean bent her head to the rebuke, and wished Miss Gilbert good-morning, turning away with a heavy heart. But Miss Gilbert held out her hand, and added kindly; for indeed her heart went out to Jean in a way that she could not herself understand, so very unbusiness-like was it,

"My dear, I have only been speaking for your good, and you must not fancy me quite so cross an old woman as I may appear to be. But the truth is, the world is not good enough to seem exactly what it is; and while that is the case, it is better for one's own peace not to attempt to lift the veil which it draws over its imperfections."

A little mystified, but grateful for the elder lady's evident kind intent, Jean murmured an apology, and promised to try to amend her manners.

Miss Gilbert sighed as she bent over her desk again, "Ah, the pity of it, that the child's eyes should ever be opened!"

"It is my manner that is offensive," thought Jean, as she walked homeward. "It must be my unfortunate manner; for I'm sure I did not want to wound Mrs. Tweedie's feelings, though I did not like her. I wonder if I were to write a note asking her to pardon it."

It was not very exhilarating to return to the Brice circle for the rest of the day, notwithstanding her liking for her landlady. But her walk to and from the agent's was a too long one for her to feel inclined for more exercise. So she made the best of it; indeed, not a little astonishing Mrs. Brice at her capacity in that way. The only lady who entered her little shop parlor was an unfavorable specimen of her class, who always declined a seat, and stood with her rich dress gathered about her, while putting Mrs. Brice through her weekly examination respecting the tracts left for her perusal. But here was Jean sitting down among them, making herself quite at home, and brightening the little room with her presence. It was only when Thomas Brice came in that she began to feel ill at ease, and anxious to make her escape.

It was Johnny's opinion, which he tried to impress upon Sissy and Susy, that the new lodger was but a pretended sort of lady, after all; else she'd never take up so with mother. Why, she'd do any thing for mother—nurse the baby or any thing! Mrs. Wild, the butcher's wife, was ever so much grander and like a lady than Miss Bell. Catch *her* speaking to mother as Miss Bell did! Sissy and Susy were slightly uncertain in their opinion. They would have preferred Jean being more of a lady than Mrs. Wild, because they liked her better; but they could not deny that the butcher's wife was grander. Mrs. Brice herself saw, and saw clearer than any one with whom Jean came in contact, and was cheered and

refreshed by the knowledge, though it somewhat contravened her husband's notions about superiority.

It happened that Jean was washing the cups and saucers that had been used at tea, when Thomas Brice returned that evening.

"You're doing that don't look right, miss!" he said, with what was meant for politeness. Jean laughed. "Do I seem awkward, Mr. Brice?"

"Tain't work for such as you, miss."

"I am afraid you have a very poor opinion of my capacity, Mr. Brice," she returned, polishing away. Then neatly arranging them in the little cupboard by the fireplace, she added, "There, I'm sure they look clean and tidy, do they not, Mrs. Brice?"

"You like to do it, I know, miss, and I'm sure you're wonderful handy; but it is not fit work for you, and—" She was stopped with a kiss on her cheek, as Jean passed out of the room. Someway she could not get over her disinclination to remain in Mr. Brice's society. The solitude of her tiny room was infinitely preferable, although she was obliged to sit wrapped up in a shawl. But there was to be no more thinking of Maud's husband; that was not safe thinking yet. So she got out her books, and set to work trying to put Schiller into readable English. An hour later came a low tap at the door, and Mrs. Brice looked in.

"There's a nice fire down-stairs, Miss Bell, and the children's very quiet." Then a little more pleadingly, seeing the other's disinclination. "If you wouldn't mind coming down, please. Thomas he fancies it's because of him, though I tell him you've got things to do upstairs, most like."

Jean looked at the other's pale face, and red-rimmed eyes turned entreatingly upon her, and guessed something of the truth. The whole truth, that Thomas Brice was beginning to abuse his wife about Jean always leaving the room when he entered it, she did not suspect.

"I will come down, Mrs. Brice," she said, kindly.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind coming after I've been down a few minutes?" whispered Mrs. Brice, consciously.

Jean took the hint, and, after waiting a short time, so that Thomas Brice should not suspect what had been his wife's errand, she descended to the little parlor again.

"Will you let me go on with baby's frock, Mrs. Brice? I want something to do."

"You are very good, I'm sure, miss; and works beautiful, that you do!" said the good woman, putting the little frock and cotton box before Jean, and then returning to her corner, where she was doing some washing.

She appeared to Jean to be nearly always washing in the evenings. Indeed, the smallness of her children's wardrobes obliged her to do a little every day, mostly after they

were gone to bed, so as to have clean socks and pinafores ready for them in the morning. But there was not the consequent discomfort to be seen in many a poor home. Her tub was kept in one corner of the room, and the latter was always delicately clean, the soap-suds being used to scrub it out the last thing every night. Moreover, the fireplace was always clean and tidy, and she managed to keep a bright little fire burning by adding a few pieces of coal and coke at the time, so that there was no necessity for the waste of constant stirring and sudden makings-up.

"You may as well get me half an ounce of bacca before you begin again, Martha," said her husband, going on in a friendly way to inform Jean that he was nothing without his "bacca."

Mrs. Brice wiped her arms, counted out some farthings from a cup on the mantelshelf, and started off on her errand. "If any one comes, you will tell them I sha'n't be long, Thomas."

"All right."

A few minutes passed silently. Jean was not inclined to talk, and Thomas Brice was reading, or affecting to read, a journal in his hand. The silence was broken by some sharp raps upon the counter, and a small voice bawling out "Shop!"

"The misses will be back in a minute!" called out her lord and master; adding, with a confidential smile to Jean, that "serving them little shavers with lollipops wasn't in his line."

"Indeed!"

There was silence again. Mrs. Brice came hurrying in, presented the tobacco to her husband, served the small customer, and returned to her washing again.

"There's a capital thing in here this week, mother," presently said Thomas Brice, turning his paper over, and giving a side glance in Jean's direction. "The man that wrote it must have heard my speech at the club last week, I think. It's called 'What keeps the Working-man Down?' and some of it is word for word what I said."

"To think of that, now!" ejaculated good Mrs. Brice, feeling called upon to say something.

Then, as Jean silently stitched on, he more directly appealed to her, "Now, what should you say, miss? I should like to know what you think it is that keeps a working-man down?"

Jean gravely considered a few moments, then replied, "Idleness, I suppose."

"I didn't mean what keeps him out of work," he replied, eying her rather surlily; "though it ain't always idleness that does that. What I ask is, What starves his intellect? What keeps a man down to the level of a brute, and prevents his holding up his head among his fellow-men?"

Jean conscientiously considered again (not aware that Thomas Brice did not intend his questions to be answered by any body but himself, and only paused to give point to his ready-prepared peroration), and then quietly said, "I really do not know, if it be not idleness, Mr. Brice; that is, if he is in health, and can get any kind of work to do."

"Work won't feed his intellect."

"But it would earn something to feed it."

"You speak like a fine lady, as don't know what work is, miss. Work won't pay for more than victuals and drink, in these days. Come, we will put it easier," he added, in consideration of her sex. "Say he's a carpenter by trade, like me, and say he feels that he's up to doing something better than starving only to get bread-and-cheese, how is he to set to work? What's he to do?"

"Prove it, I suppose," returned unconscious Jean, calmly snipping off a length of thread.

"How's that to be done? How would you set about doing that, without any body to lend you a helping hand? Come, now, miss; I should like to know how you would set about proving it."

"Well," said Jean, "if I were a carpenter, I think I would begin by trying to make the very best stool that ever was made."

"You don't call making a stool work for a man's intellect?" loftily.

"Oh yes, I do. I meant a wonderful stool, you know; one that would require extraordinary intelligence to make it."

"But how if you wanted to do something more useful than making stools to help your fellow-men? What if you felt you had got the stuff in you, say, to write a book as would set the whole world a-thinking and raise humanity to—a higher level?"

"Then I would write it," promptly replied Jean.

"How could you do that, if you'd got five or six mouths to feed—from constantly repeating it at meetings, and so forth, he had come to believe that he did feed the five or six mouths)—by hard work?"

"It would take all the longer, of course; being written at odd times," said Jean; "but it would be a pleasant change from the other kind of work, and even half an hour a day would tell in time."

Mr. Brice puffed silently at his pipe a while; refreshed himself with a glance at his journal, and then said, with an indulgent smile, "You only look at the outside of things, that's what it is, miss. If you had gone into the question as deep as I have, you'd see the rights of it, and know that the real cause of the working-man being kept down is because the rich are afraid of us. They know that many of us are more than a match for them; if we could only get a start, we should soon change places with them. When it becomes a question of man

and man, then you will see. The time will come—it's getting nearer and nearer every day—when the distinction of wealth will be done away with."

"I am glad to hear it. There isn't much distinction in merely being rich, is there?" said Jean, her thoughts reverting to Mrs. Tweedie's glories.

Thomas Brice felt that he was beginning to make himself understood at last.

"What I say is this, miss. Why should a poor man be made to slave his life out, and kept down to the level of a brute, while another has got thousands a year, and nothing to do but pamper his appetites? Why isn't one of God's creatures as good as another?"

"He ought to be," said Jean.

"That's just what I see; he ought to be. But he isn't. A poor man has got no opportunity of showing the stuff that's in him."

"I don't know about poor men, Mr. Brice; but poor women have got lots of opportunity. Look at Mrs. Brice (the latter had been called out to serve a customer). Any one must be blind, indeed, not to see her superiority. She seems to spend her whole time in helping others; even finds time to help her neighbors, as well as spend her life for you and the children."

"That's true about mother," said Johnny, who had come in and stood leaning against the mantel-shelf, listening open-mouthed to the conversation. "But who would change with her? See how hard she's got to work, and all for nothing."

"When I once gets a start, she sha'n't work so hard," said Thomas Brice, his face rather redder than usual. "Not but what she likes doing it; don't you, mother?"

"Likes doing what, Thomas?" a little wearily asked his wife, as she re-entered the room, and bent over her tub again.

"Why, keeping things ship-shape, and the children clean and tidy?"

"Oh yes; I never minds work, Thomas."

"Let me help you, Mrs. Brice; that tub is too heavy for you," said Jean, springing to her assistance, as the former was with some difficulty making her way with it toward the back scullery.

"Go and help your mother, Johnny," said Thomas Brice.

"Oh yes!" returned Johnny with a grin, keeping his hands in his pockets, and taking his father's words as a jest.

Notwithstanding Mrs. Brice's protests, Jean assisted her until the tub was safely deposited in the sink. Something in her face, as she took her seat again, brought forth the answering remark from Thomas Brice, "You don't call that men's work, miss?"

"The few I have known were gentlemen," hotly returned Jean, who was fast losing her temper.

"Then I'm sure you haven't seen 'em carrying tubs."



"I am glad I know one who would not sit still and watch a weak woman doing it."

"You seem very ready at flinging out at other people," said Mr. Brice, beginning to lose his temper.

"I'm sure miss didn't mean any thing unkind, Thomas," anxiously put in his wife, who, from bitter experience, had a terror of his getting offended.

"I did mean it; but perhaps I ought not to have said it," said the girl, remembering Miss Gilbert's warning. "I was in a temper, and I'm sorry, Mr. Brice."

He would have been more satisfied had she omitted the first part of her apology, but, to his wife's great relief, he graciously accepted it. "You see, miss, you haven't got rent and taxes on your mind," he somewhat irrelevantly explained. For some reason he could hardly explain to himself, he was still a little desirous to set himself right with Jean. "You've no call to complain about your station in life. You'll be getting a hundred a year or so and your keep, with servants to wait upon you, for just spending two or three hours a day in teaching."

"Oh no, indeed I shall not, Mr. Brice. I was offered only nine pounds a year for teaching five children yesterday, and I am not quite sure that I was right in refusing it."

"I thought ladies that could teach accomplishments and things got a deal more than that, miss."

"Some do—some get as much as you talk about, Mr. Brice, but I could not."

"Well, at the worst you've got friends as would help you, I dare say, miss?" eying her curiously.

"Oh yes; they do not want me to work at all. I have a good home with them, only I prefer working for myself."

"Prefer working?" ejaculated Johnny, staring open-mouthed at Jean, as though he were regarding some wonderful phenomenon which had not before come under his notice.

Thomas Brice puffed silently away at his pipe, quietly working out a solution to a certain problem which had somewhat puzzled him before. His lodger had run away from her home, no doubt in a temper—as she called it; it was easy to see she'd got a temper of her own, and was now going to play at getting her living.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### SUCCESS AT LAST.

"DIDN'T you say that miss was at some school near here, mother?" said Thomas Brice, after Jean had retired to her own room that night.

"Yes; at Ivy Lodge, along the road: Miss Bowles's, you know."

"Ah!" smoking complacently on. For he

fancied he had hit upon a certain scheme for the carrying-out of which brains would be of more service than labor.

"Isn't she kind and good, Thomas? Not a bit set up, though every one can see she's quite a lady."

"That's to be proved," returned her husband, with a wise air; "she hasn't got quite the cut of the lady about her, to my mind." The ladies of his experience had ordered him hither and thither, and never condescended to matters beyond carpentering with him. He would not acknowledge to himself that Jean's good or bad opinion of him was worth any thing. Was Thomas Brice, capable of doing great things for the benefit of humanity, to be influenced by any thing a chit of a girl might say? Certainly not. If she had once heard him at the club she would have known better than to try.

Nevertheless, from that night a change crept gradually, and for some time imperceptibly, over the Brice household. Though Thomas Brice still kept up his own dignity in his home by doing nothing and requiring as much waiting upon as ever, he began to make his children do a little in the way of assisting their overworked mother, and his orders were enforced with blows if not immediately obeyed.

When father was at home, Susy and Sissy were no longer allowed to remain playing if the hearth wanted sweeping up, or the baby required nursing. Moreover, Johnny was threatened with the first place that turned up, and in the mean time ordered hither and thither in a way which he highly disapproved.

Thomas Brice began to experience quite a moral enjoyment in setting others to work, proving quite to his own satisfaction his fitness to govern. When the new order of things came about, he would take a prominent position in the government of the people, by right of his capacity to rule. Not that there was no rebellion in his present kingdom. All sorts of murmurs rose from his eldest-born, Johnny, who was found much less amenable to the new rule than the younger ones.

"Oh yes, father is fond of showing off; it is easy to set other people to work," and so forth. And once or twice the indignant father had caught the words, "Why don't you set to work yourself, then?"

Punishment followed as a matter of course, and Johnny howled out his acknowledgment of the force of that kind of argument. Nevertheless, he managed to make Thomas Brice understand that he was no longer a hero in his son's eyes. "Father's a sneak; he won't do nothing hisself, and he's always a-knocking me about for not wanting to do things!" again and again grumbled Johnny to his mother.

On the whole, poor Mrs. Brice would perhaps have preferred things going on in the old way. She would gladly have dispensed with the assistance of the children—rendered with sobs, and enforced, so to speak, at the point of the bayonet. She could not yet realize the good which might arise after this unpleasant state of transition.

The time was going on wearily enough with Jean, who found her small store of money rapidly diminishing, while no engagement offered. She had twice lent small sums of money, now to make up his rent, and now for taxes, to her landlord, through his wife, who seemed to have been worked up to the pitch of desperation before she could ask.

"I know she hasn't got much money, Thomas; she spends so little on herself, won't even take an omnibus now, unless it's raining fast."

"Did you ask her what I told you?"

"Yes; but she did not seem to like to say where her friends lived. She said she would never apply to them, and never go back."

"We shall see!" nodded the husband. "I know what to do when the right time comes."

Jean went regularly every morning to Miss Gilbert's; it seemed her only chance. But day after day it was the same story, "Nothing that will suit you, I fear, Miss Bell;" with occasionally a kindly look, and the addition, "This is just our dulllest season."

The few ladies Jean saw gave her to understand, more or less gracefully, that her not being able to offer any reference was an insurmountable difficulty.

She had been quite earnest in telling Mrs. Brice that she would neither return nor apply to her friends. She felt that it was impossible to go back to Fernside. Had there been no other reason—had she not awakened to the fact that Maud had taken an unconquerable aversion to her—she felt that she could not meet Nugent Orme as she ought to be able to meet the husband of another woman. It had been all very well to tell herself that she would overcome her love for Maud's husband; she was painfully conscious that she had not yet succeeded in doing so.

Her inquiries of Mrs. Brice as to the probability of being able to obtain a living by doing plain needle-work, were listened to with a grave shake of the head.

"My dear, I'm sorry to say as there's five or six trying to keep body and soul together at it in this very street." After a while she added, a little doubtfully, "I didn't like to name it before, but if so be as you didn't mind teaching French and the pianer to our baker's wife's children, she is looking out for somebody to learn them, and pays sixpence an hour?"

"Mind! I should be very thankful to do it; why, of course I should," responded Jean. "Will you kindly say a word for me, Mrs. Brice?"

"That I will, miss, and welcome."

But it turned out that the baker's wife had engaged a governess for her daughters. Mrs. Brice did not consider it necessary to inform Jean how many candidates there had been for the sixpence an hour.

"Do you think if I were to ask at some of the shops myself?" inquired Jean.

"Well, there could be no harm in asking, could there?" returned Mrs. Brice, trying to look hopeful.

But before Jean had acquired the necessary courage, fortune seemed inclined to smile upon her. That morning she went as usual to Miss Gilbert's, and began her weary waiting, sitting in the outer office, silent and apart from the other candidates. She fancied that they knew of the disparity between herself and them, and that they avoided her in consequence; while they interpreted her shyness and reserve to mean pride, and made no advances toward her. But there was very little opportunity for forming friendship in any case. New faces were constantly coming and going. Even her acquaintance, who had complained of having waited so long, had found an engagement at last.

"Will you come this way, Miss Bell?" said Miss Gilbert.

Jean rose, and went into the inner office slowly and hopelessly. She was getting accustomed to disappointment now. She was introduced to a slight, reticent-looking lady of between fifty and sixty years of age, dressed in the fashion of some thirty years back, her gray hair being arranged in clusters of tight short curls beneath her large black silk bonnet.

"This is Miss Bell, Miss Drake."

Jean bowed, conscious that two keen dark eyes were surveying her from head to foot.

"This lady is seeking a companion, Miss Bell," went on Miss Gilbert, "and thinks that you might possibly suit her. I have mentioned the slight disadvantage about reference, but Miss Drake thinks that might probably be looked over."

"If we can find the right kind of lady," put in Miss Drake. "Miss Gilbert's very high personal opinion of you has, I acknowledge, great weight with me, Miss Bell." Miss Gilbert had stretched a point in Jean's favor. In truth, she thought she had said a great deal more than a woman of her experience ought to have said about a comparative stranger. But, some way, she never had been quite sensible and business-like with regard to Jean. Of late she had told herself, "I really must get the child some kind of situation, or I shall be doing something ridiculous—asking her to come and live with me, or something."

Jean lifted her eyes gratefully to Miss Gilbert's face.

"Moreover, it is not a disadvantage in my eyes that—" Miss Drake mentally added—"you have quarreled with your friends; but," she said, "there have been family differences, and you will not be always wanting to go home, which makes young people unsettled, besides affording opportunity for foolish tattling. My sister and I require a lady who is truthful, self-controlled, and good-tempered, rather than merely accomplished, and she must not object to a very quiet life."

"I should not object to it," nervously began Jean, "and I do tell the truth; but—"

"So I informed Miss Drake," put in Miss Gilbert, with a warning glance at Jean.

"Capable of self-control, I hope?"

Jean hurriedly examined herself. "Was she?"

"I think I am, Miss Drake," she replied, a little doubtfully.

But Miss Drake did not perceive any reservation, and went on: "The salary we offer is not a very large one, Miss Bell, but it might be increased if you suit us. We offer forty pounds a year."

"Forty pounds!" ejaculated Jean. "That is much more than I hoped for."

Miss Gilbert passed her hand over her mouth to conceal a smile. But Miss Drake was evidently not a lady after Mrs. Tweedie's pattern, merely replying,

"There is not very much required; merely a little music occasionally, an hour or so's reading, and the capability for conversing, or remaining silent when conversation is not desired."

"I would try my very best," eagerly said Jean, so dazzled by the prospect as hardly to be able to display the required capacity for self-control. "I am not clever, but—"

"We do not require a young lady who thinks herself clever," returned Miss Drake.

"I must say it," thought Jean, wringing her hands under her cloak in her fear of what the saying it might involve. Then she began, in a low, agitated voice, "About my temper—"

"I really do not think you need have any scruples upon that score, Miss Bell," impatiently interrupted Miss Gilbert.

"Your scruples are very creditable to you, nevertheless, Miss Bell," said Miss Drake, with a satisfied nod. After a few moments' consideration she went on: "Well, I think I may go so far as to ask you to come to Drayford House as soon as possible: on Thursday, if that day will be convenient to you."

"To try how you like me?" asked Jean, with a glowing face.

"I hope it may be to remain permanently, Miss Bell." Then she added, "In taking you without a reference, we have a right, I think, to expect that on your side you will do your best to make yourself companionable."

The meaning of which little tag to the agreement Jean would come to understand later. She promptly replied,

"Indeed you have, Miss Drake, and I will do my very best."

"That is all we require. Let me see—this is Tuesday. If you can arrange to come to us by midday, Thursday, we shall be glad to receive you. Drayford House is about half an hour's drive from the Twickenham railway station, and you will find a fly waiting to convey you thither if you go down by the train which leaves Waterloo at twelve o'clock. You will afterward understand my reasons for not entering further into particulars respecting our habits, and so forth. I can only promise you a very comfortable home if you have the good sense to appreciate it." Then she held out her hand. "Good-morning, Miss Bell. Miss Gilbert, I am obliged by the interest you have taken in the matter, and will remit you the fees, whatever they may be, incurred by Miss Bell or myself, if you will let me have a memorandum. Good-morning."

Jean endeavored to express something of the gratitude she felt toward her kind friend, Miss Gilbert, and then set forth on her homeward walk with a light heart.

Entering the little shop parlor, she commenced proceedings by putting her arms round Mrs. Brice's neck and indulging in a good cry.

"Am I not fortunate at last?" she ejaculated, when at length her news was told.

"Well, it do seem lucky, to be sure, deary. Forty pound a year and your keep, for only reading and playing the planner, and being good-tempered! Why, that's better than teaching, ain't it?"

"Of course it is."

"Did you say as there was two sisters, deary?"

"Yes." And, for the first time, it occurred to Jean as rather odd that two sisters living together should require a companion.

"And did she seem a nice-spoken lady, miss?"

"Yes," said Jean, a little hesitatingly. "As pleasant as you could expect a stranger to be;" and she added, recollecting Mrs. Tweedie, "She really is a lady."

For some cause unguessed at by his wife, Thomas Brice appeared more disappointed at hearing the news than even the loss of a good lodger could account for.

"You know we did not expect miss to stop longer than a few days at first, Thomas; and she's been with us nigh upon a month now." A happy month it had proved for the poor overworked wife. When the last good-bye had been spoken, and the cab had turned the corner of the street, Mrs. Brice stood crying on the door-step, feeling as though all the sunlight had been suddenly withdrawn from her life. She returned to the little

back room with red eyelids and quivering lips, hardly able to manage a smile at the wonders displayed by Sissy and Susy.

Just before her departure Jean had given them a hint that they would find something in her little room. They had lost no time in the quest, and there, on the bed, were two beautiful dolls, so alike that it was impossible to dispute over them, a gay rattle for baby, a wonderful knife for Johnny, and a nice warm dress for mother, with a golden sovereign pinned in its folds.

For Jean felt so rich now—quite able to afford the luxury of making these little presents. Was she not going to be rich?

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### NEW FRIENDS.

ON arriving at the Twickenham station, Jean found a fly waiting to convey her to Drayford House. Her tiny trunk was speedily deposited by the driver's side, and she was journeying on again toward her destination. She peered curiously out at the houses she passed on the road. "Was it this? Ah, what a pretty place—that looked a real home!" Then she now and again caught sight of the river, and wondered if it would be her good fortune to live near it. How delightful if Drayford House should prove to be one of those pretty places with fine trees about it, and with grounds running down to the river! But she presently began to grow a little impatient in her eagerness to know what fate had in store for her. Miss Drake had said it was only half an hour's drive from the station to the house. Surely they had been longer than that on the road! How slowly the stupid man seemed to be driving! The fly turned into a branch road, and in another two minutes stopped before a massive, antique-looking gate let into a high wall. The man slowly descended from the box, and rang a hanging bell—far above the reach of mischievous boys.

"If I could only see the house!" thought impatient Jean, peering curiously out. "The wall seems to go up to the sky!"

A small trap-door was pushed aside from within, and, after some one had carefully reconnoitred, the gate was grudgingly opened by a stern-looking elderly woman. Without taking the slightest notice of Jean's timid inquiry if this were Miss Drake's, or even vouchsafing a glance toward her, the woman bade the driver put the young lady's luggage inside, and not be all day about it. It was done quickly enough, and without any undue expenditure of strength. The woman's tight face relaxed into as near a smile as it was capable of expressing, as she glanced down at the shabby little trunk and bag

which constituted Jean's luggage. The latter took out her purse. But the woman put the fare, which she held ready, into the man's hand, and, ignoring his thanks and cheery "Good-day," unceremoniously shut the door in his face and carefully locked it.

Jean found herself standing in a covered way leading from the gate to the house, a little uncomfortably, conscious that she was locked away from the outer world. But she was allowed no time for reflection.

"This way, if you please," said the woman, unceremoniously taking the lead. She was not attractive in appearance. Tall and straight and grim, and out-of-date-looking, from her face and figure down to the smallest item in her dress, she seemed a walking-protest against every thing in the shape of attractiveness; a white muslin neckerchief being pinned primly across the breast of her faded brown silk dress, and the frilling of her cap setting as stiffly round her hard face as though it were carved in stone.

Jean followed, not more confidently for hearing the words, "Chit! baby! doll!" murmured by her grim conductress. They went up the covered entrance, and passed through a wide, old-fashioned door-way, into a large square hall, its checkered black-and-white marble floor covered here and there with tiger-skin mats. But, although the general aspect was rather cold and gloomy, the huge pictures, specimens of old armor, and quaintly shaped chairs, almost black with age, imparted to it an air of romance in Jean's eyes. Her conductress paused, looked doubtfully at her a moment, then opened a door facing the entrance, and announced "Miss Bell!"

Jean timidly advanced into a long room, running the width of the house; its high, narrow windows opening to the ground, and commanding a view of a large old-fashioned garden, to which the predominance of yews and other dark shrubs imparted a somewhat weird and sombre appearance. The aspect of the room itself was not less gloomy and depressing. Although the finely carved old furniture would have been almost priceless in the eyes of an antiquary, it certainly required a more cheerful background. Walls, curtains, carpet, and furniture all looked dark and heavy together.

Jean bowed to a lady, who rose at her entrance from a seat on the right of the fireplace, and whom she supposed to be the same that had engaged her. But a voice on the left said, "Good-morning, Miss Bell;" and then Jean saw an exact counterpart rising from a seat on the left. So exactly alike were the two ladies, that the young girl stood for a moment looking from one to the other quite bewildered. But the lady on the left offered her hand, and introduced the other as "My sister, Miss Bell—Miss Drake."

Then Jean obeyed her courteous gesture, and seated herself in a high-backed chair,

apparently placed ready for her, exactly in the centre, at a sufficient distance from the fire, between the two ladies.

"You did not find the journey here a fatiguing one, Miss Bell?"

"Oh no, not in the least; I shouldn't have minded if it had been ever so much longer."

"You do not object to railway traveling?"

"I like it very much, Miss Drake. It's the flying along, and putting the bits together."

"I beg your pardon?"

"The pretty bits of scenery—making pictures out of them," explained Jean.

"Oh, indeed," on the right.

"You have not traveled much, I presume, Miss Bell?" on the left.

"Only three times that I can remember, Miss Drake. Once from London to Cambridgeshire, once back, and now here."

"My sister is the elder, Miss Bell."

"I beg pardon," said Jean; adding, with a smile, "I shall know better by-and-by; but you are so very much alike!"

"Alike!"

"Alike!" repeated both ladies, with what Jean thought sounded very much like anger in their tones. Then went on the lady on her right: "I do not think any two persons could be more essentially dissimilar than are my sister and myself, Miss Bell."

"I can not understand any one not perceiving the difference; alike, indeed!" from the left, each lady drawing herself up with an indignant air. After a few moments, recommenced the lady on the right, "I must beg you for the future to recollect that I am Miss Drake, Miss Bell."

"And be good enough to remember that I infinitely prefer being Miss Barbara," severely, from the left.

"I will do my best," replied Jean, trying to fix upon some mark of difference by which to distinguish one from the other, but failing to detect any—both ladies so exactly resembled each other, in feature, coloring, and expression. Their thin narrow faces, keen dark eyes, aquiline noses, long upper lips, reticent-looking mouths, and decided chins, were the very counterparts of each other. "If they always sit on the same side of the fire as they are sitting now, I might know by that," thought Jean.

"Have you taken luncheon, Miss Bell?"

"Yes, thank you, Miss Barbara," returned Jean, who had indulged in a bun at the railway station.

"Then probably you would like to refresh your toilet," said Miss Barbara, ringing a bell by her side. "And, if you would like to occupy yourself in unpacking and arranging your wardrobe, pray consider yourself free until the dinner hour. Martha will render any assistance you may require. We dine at six;" adding to the woman who obeyed the summons (the same that had admitted

Jean), "Show Miss Bell to her room, Martha, and do what you can to assist her there."

"Very well, ma'am."

Martha led the way up a grand old staircase, with elaborately carved oak balusters and a boar-hunt painted on the walls, to a gallery. Then, opening a massive door, she pushed back an inner one, and ushered Jean into a bedroom so large and grandly furnished, in the same dark, gloomy fashion as the lower rooms, that Jean's shabby little trunk and bag looked like impertinent intruders there. The high, narrow windows commanded the same view as that from the room they had just quit.

Martha gravely opened the doors of a huge wardrobe, disclosing great gulfs of space—accommodation enough for the contents of a dozen such trunks as Jean's, and then proceeded to open four or five great drawers. Jean broke into a merry laugh. How many years had elapsed since such a laugh had echoed in that room!

"This is all I have in the world; and the room I have just come from would hardly hold it. What a change, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," said Martha, her face slightly relaxing again. But she was looking grim enough the next moment as she said, with unwilling politeness, "If you don't like this room, you can have your choice of two others; though there isn't much difference in them, that I can see."

"No, thank you, unless there is one not quite so large and grand. This is so much better than any room I have ever had. I mean grander," her thoughts reverting to her cozy nest at Fernside, to which it was impossible to compare this for comfort.

"They are all about the same," repeated Martha.

"This must be a very large house, is it not?"

"Yes." Then, as she stooped to unfasten the straps of the trunk, and Jean was proceeding to take off her bonnet and cloak, "You are very young to set up for being a companion."

"Not so young as you would imagine. How old should you think me?" returned Jean, turning a laughing, rosy face toward the old woman.

"Well, I suppose you're over ten."

"Oh, Martha! Why I am nearly seventeen!"

"And I suppose you think it is quite a grand thing to be a companion. It sounds so pleasant, don't it? You're expecting a fine time of it, I warrant; lots of gayety and gallanting about. Given up a good home, maybe, to play at being independent of your friends and getting money for yourself, and expects it's going to be all accompanying, and dancing, and fiddling?"

"Oh no, indeed, Martha! Why, I am as

poor as poor, and expected to have to work ever so hard!"

"Well, maybe you won't be altogether disappointed about that; you'll find it hard enough to please you, I dare say," chuckled Martha. "No nice young men to comfort you, neither."

"I don't want any."

Martha chuckled again, with a side look up into the bonnie face. Jean knelt down, unlocked her trunk, and lifted out her best dress. "Will this do for dinner, do you think, Martha? I have only these two black and two linen ones."

"There was enough spent on them to buy two or three more," said the old woman, eying the rich crape trimmings. "But you'll find you won't want much in the dress way here."

The dresses were hung in the wardrobe, and Jean's small store of under-clothing spread over the bottom of one of the drawers. Then Martha stood eying the girl as she arranged her long hair, half conscious what a pretty picture she made with her round white arms raised, as she deftly wound the soft gold-brown plaits into a crown about her head. Not that Martha would for the world have acknowledged herself capable of the weakness of admiring pictures, or any thing else that was pretty.

"Do you think I ought to go down now, Martha?" presently asked Jean. "Miss Drake said that I might consider myself free until dinner-time; but that might have been only out of kindness, you know, and I have done all I want to do."

"Most people are glad of as much freedom as they can get," was all that Martha vouchsafed in the way of reply as she went out of the room.

Not quite sure that she ought to go down, Jean stood gazing out of one of the windows at the blank wall which shut out the view, whatever it was, beyond the garden. Why was the wall built so high, that not even from this upper window could be seen any thing beyond? "One feels as though built in without any chance of escape," she murmured, beginning to be a little affected by the depressing aspect of things. But she resolutely battled against it, and turned to her usual panacea against unpleasant reflection, getting out her school-books, and plodding steadily at work until she heard a clock chime the quarter to six. Putting away her books, she went down to the room she had at first been ushered into, stopping by the way to introduce herself, and, as she termed it, make friends with a picture which attracted her attention in the gallery. It represented the interior of a grand old hall, at one of the deep oriel-windows of which, in the red glory of sunset, were two figures—a fair girl, standing with clasped hands, and tender, upturned eyes, before a noble-

looking cavalier, who was listening to her words with bowed head and hand upon his sword-hilt. "You do not mind my looking, do you, dear?" murmured Jean; "I have had to say good-bye, too; a worse good-bye than yours, for he will come back to you. Ah, I am sure of it, after he has gained the victory, and you will be all the prouder of him when he has proved himself what you believe him to be."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### LIFE AT DRAYFORD HOUSE.

JEAN found the two ladies seated as she had left them on either side the fire-place. They were reading, each having a table by her side upon which were books, papers, needle-work, etc. Each said a few polite words to Jean, expressing a hope that she liked her room, and so forth, and both smiled a little at her enthusiasm about the house.

"I hope you may continue to like the old house, Miss Bell; two or three of the ladies who staid with us complained of finding it dull," said the lady on the left, whom Jean was learning to know as Miss Barbara. Looking doubtfully at the young bright face, she added, "But possibly you do not depend so much upon your surroundings as do most people?"

"Yes; I think I do," said Jean, her thoughts reverting to Mrs. Tweedie's glories. "I do not think I could be happy in some houses. They seem to have nothing to tell you but about themselves, and the furniture looks so conceited about having cost so much. I am sure I shall not be dull here when I have learned to know the things more, and they don't mind me."

"I hope you are not romantic, Miss Bell," said Miss Drake. "Take my advice, and do not encourage a tendency to be enthusiastic. You will probably find that your enthusiasm is turned into a weapon against yourself by colder and more calculating natures."

"There is another and better reason for not indulging in sentimentality," said Miss Barbara. "My sister might have added that such a tendency might possibly lead you into very ridiculous as well as improper relations with your fellow-creatures."

"But," said the sister on the right, with a cold smile at Jean, "there is something even worse than being enthusiastic, Miss Bell; I trust that you are not one of those very objectionable people who fancy they have no weaknesses. According to my experience, those who pride themselves upon their superiority over others are not only wanting in the Christian grace of love to the neighbor, but capable of the meanest acts."

"Nobody ever thought I was without weaknesses—" Jean was cheerfully begin-

ning, when the door opened and dinner was announced.

The lady on the left rose and led the way, her sister and Jean following. Another grand old room, furnished after the same style as the rest of the house, only a trifle more massively, in dining-room fashion, and with fine old pictures—mostly portraits of the Miss Drakes' ancestors—on the walls. Although this room was in the front of the house, the view from the windows was not more cheerful than that from the drawing-room—the only difference being that there was not quite so much distance between the windows and the high, frowning walls as at the back of the house.

"I wish there were not quite so much wall everywhere!" thought Jean. In the mean time, she had quite forgotten to note which was the elder sister again. "Now, which is Miss Drake?" she speculated uneasily, glancing from one to the other. "Oh, of course she is at the head of the table!" But when she addressed the lady sitting there as Miss Drake, she received a sharp rebuke from her. "I informed you that I am not Miss Drake, and I must beg you to remember it, Miss Bell."

"I will try," murmured Jean, apologetically.

The lady at the bottom of the table said, gently, "Your mistake was a very natural one, Miss Bell. It is not at all surprising that you should expect to see an elder sister in an elder sister's place."

"Unless you had reason to believe that the elder had forfeited her right to occupy it," sharply put in Miss Barbara. "Shall I send you some chicken, Miss Bell?"

"If you please," returned bewildered Jean. She noticed that each lady helped herself from the dish set before her, and that each had her own servant, who, except to attend upon Jean, did not leave her own side of the table. Even the sweets were, as the other courses, exactly the same at each end of the table, so that neither lady had to assist the other, or consult her wishes in any way. Both were manifestly gentlewomen, and studiously polite to Jean when she herself was in question; courteously sending whatever was best to her; and the dinner, though unpretending, was extremely good, as well as daintily dressed and served—the well-trained servants moving deftly and silently about their work. They were two middle-aged women, with the stolid look of respectability in their faces.

"We do not employ men-servants, you see, Miss Bell," said Miss Barbara, when dessert was set on, and the women had quit the room.

For lack of any thing else to say, Jean murmured a supposition that "Miss Barbara preferred women-servants."

can not say that I do to wait at ta-

ble. Until a certain date, we always kept men-servants, and found them more efficient in the work. But circumstances obliged us to discontinue employing them in this house. With the exception of the gardener, who is an elderly man, and does not come regularly, we do not employ men-servants."

"Indeed," said Jean, wondering what the circumstances were. Happening to glance at Miss Drake, she noticed that the color in her face was a great deal heightened.

With a smile upon her lips, Miss Barbara rose from the table and led the way to the drawing-room. There each lady took her seat by the fire; each having a reading-lamp placed upon her own table by her side, and this time Jean took care to note which was the elder and which the younger. Her own place was evidently intended to remain in the centre, between the two. Miss Barbara, who seemed to take the lead in the arrangements, politely bade Jean make herself at home with her surroundings. "My sister and I generally indulge in a nap after dinner, Miss Bell. Perhaps you would like to amuse yourself with the books, or you will find some fine engravings on that stand, if you prefer looking at them." Jean delightedly availed herself of the privilege. By the time tea was brought in, she had come to the conclusion that she was the most fortunate girl in all the world to be permitted to live in communion with such treasures. She was requested to make tea, an urn being brought in in the old-fashioned way, and each lady took it at her own separate table. Both continued very pleasant and kind in their bearing toward herself. "But how very odd they do not speak to each other!" thought Jean, as the evening wore on; "I really do not believe that I have heard them exchange a single word since I came." Moreover, she was beginning to feel uncomfortable under the impression that when she pleased one sister she displeased the other.

"As my sister doubtless took you into her confidence from the beginning, she will perhaps explain our daily habits and requirements to you, Miss Bell," gently said Miss Drake, when the tea equipage had been removed.

"Will you be good enough to relate exactly what took place at our interview, Miss Bell?" sternly said Miss Barbara. "I must beg of you to be as exact as possible, if you do not wish yourself to be misjudged and accused of all sorts of evil plotting as well as me."

"I was only told that I was engaged to act as companion to two ladies; that I was required to be truthful, self-controlled, and good-tempered; that the salary was to be forty pounds a year; and that if I did my best to be agreeable and useful the disadvantage of my not being able to give any reference would be looked over," said Jean.

"Miss Barbara has displayed her usual wisdom and penetration," said the elder lady, turning sarcastic eyes upon Jean's hot face.

Miss Barbara smiled. "Quite a compliment, is it not, Miss Bell? Wisdom and penetration! I do not often get the credit for possessing any good quality whatever; but after this I shall quite plume myself upon being almost an average human being. I may now go on to endeavor to give you some idea of our daily life, and what is expected of you. Unhappily there is a division in our house; deceit and treachery—"

"And lying and slandering," calmly from the elder.

"Have rendered it impossible that there can be the usual love and trust between relations—"

"Quite impossible!" in a quiet under-tone from the opposite side.

"But, as Christian women, we consider it our duty to forgive, if we can not forget, the past, and remain under the same roof. All that is expected of you is a strict neutrality, which, as you know nothing of the past, may be possible."

"Under that circumstance only!" firmly from the right.

"If my sister will allow me to proceed, Miss Bell, I may tell you we shall be glad to find you at the breakfast-table punctually at nine o'clock. Afterward exercise in the garden until eleven; reading until luncheon, at half-past one; garden exercise, or an occasional drive and needle-work until dinner; music, reading, and now and then a rubber at whist between tea and prayers. You can attend the church, where we have a pew, once on Sunday; my own and my sister's state of health prevents our going."

Jean bowed her acquiescence. It sounded pleasant and easy enough so far as she was concerned.

"Shall I play something now, Miss Drake?"

"Ask my sister, Miss Bell," replied the elder lady, stiffly.

"We are not very musical," said Miss Barbara; "but if you sing, my sister would probably like to hear a love song, only it *must* be something very sentimental."

"As my younger sister arrogates to herself the precedence in all things, pray sing first for her, Miss Bell; and if you know any such, I should suggest the topics jealousy and revenge as most congenial."

"I don't know any such songs," bluntly returned Jean. Then, after a few moments, she recollected that good-temper and self-control had been two things especially stipulated for, and went on more gently: "The little voice I have has not been much cultivated, and I only sing the simplest ballads; but I will play, if you will allow me."

She sat down to the piano and played

through the best of the school show-pieces she could remember, while the two ladies sat gazing with stony eyes into the fire. Afterward she went on to play some Scotch airs; but while softly going through "Should auld acquaintance be forgot," unconsciously lingering tenderly over the notes, her eyes happened to turn toward her employers, and to her consternation she perceived that they were each regarding her with stern eyes and frowning brows. But before she had time to perceive in what she had offended, a clock chimed ten, the door opened, and eight or nine servants entered the room. The elderly woman who had first received Jean carried in a large Bible and Prayer-book, placed them on the table by Miss Barbara, and then knelt down with the others, each before a chair, while that lady read prayers. Afterward the servants filed silently out again, and Jean stood waiting for her next instructions. They would be friends now—were probably only waiting until she was out of the way to make it up comfortably. As she hoped, she was dismissed, each lady shaking hands with her, and courteously expressing a wish that she would sleep well in her new home.

Greatly relieved, Jean took her candle and went her way. The great staircase and gallery were more sombre and weird-looking by the light of her solitary candle, and all sorts of fantastic threatening shapes seemed to spring out from the deep gulf of shadow as though to bar her progress. Then, when she had reached the gallery, she stood hesitating, afraid of opening the wrong door. But presently she saw some person advancing from the opposite end of the gallery, from where she afterward learned was the back staircase, and to her great relief the figure proved to be her first acquaintance, Martha.

"I am so glad," ejaculated Jean. "I do not know which is the right door."

"I thought you might be wanting something or another," replied Martha, ungraciously, opening one of the doors.

"What a very large room at night, isn't it?"

"I don't see that it's any larger than it was in the day."

"But it looks so much larger, you know; so dark in the corners," with a little involuntary shudder.

Martha gave her a little side-look. "You oughtn't to bring such things as nerves here."

"I do not think I am a nervous girl generally, but I'm not accustomed to such great places. They feel a little cold."

"You can have a fire. There is no stint of any thing here. Things are not done by halves in this house"—with the low chuckle which served Martha for a laugh.

"No, thank you. It is not that sort of cold."



"Ah! I only know of one sort."

"You can see the stars, Martha!" ejaculated Jean, who had pulled aside the heavy curtain and blind, and was gazing out into the night.

"Stars!" repeated Martha, contemptuously. "Well, I hope it will do you good to see them."

"Yes, it will," gravely returned the girl.

"The real truth of it is, I expect you're beginning to feel mother-sick already," said Martha, experiencing a sensation she could not remember ever having felt before, as she looked at Jean's face upturned to the stars.

"I do not remember either my mother or my father." Then, turning from the window, she added, a little wearily, "Even the stars don't seem quite enough to-night. Would you mind my kissing you, Martha?"

Martha uttered a protest about not having much belief in kissing, standing stiff and awkward in the middle of the room, and a faint flush rose to her face as the young girl's lips touched her cheek. But she was not going to be made uncomfortable (the feeling really was uncomfortable in its strangeness) by a chit of a girl like this!

"You've been giving your mind up to some love nonsense, I expect."

"Love nonsense! Oh, Martha, nonsense! Why, if it were not for the love things would be ever so much harder to bear. I am afraid I should grow quite wicked!"

"Oh, there's a lover, then?"

"No;" possessing herself of Martha's unwilling hand, and rubbing her soft cheek against it. "I had one for a little while—a very little—and that has to last me all my life."

"Oh!" dubiously replied Martha. "Got to last all your life, has it? I've known young ladies who have been disappointed in love before now, but it didn't take all their life to get over it."

"But I haven't been disappointed in love, Martha, and I shall never get over it. I feel just the same about it as ever. Why, it was not the love's fault, you foolish Martha," rubbing her cheek against the woman's shoulder, now that the latter's hands were not to be had, Martha having folded them tightly together over her apron.

"What makes you talk such things to me?" said Martha, turning her eyes away from the girl's face and tightening her lips. "I'm not a sort people think they can talk nonsense to. What makes you?"

"I don't know," returned Jean, wondering at herself a little for doing so, as she remembered that she had felt no necessity for introducing the same subject to kind, sympathetic Mrs. Brice, and not tracing the thought sufficiently home to perceive why she was impelled to speak of love in this

place. "I have not been accustomed to talk so; it's the big room, or something."

"Well, that's a reason, to be sure."

Jean laughed, and then a few tears stole down her cheeks. "Don't go away. Say you are not cross with me first, there's a good Martha. There, I will not let you go until you have said something kind," putting her arms round the woman's neck. "Do; just one little word—only one."

"Mercy me, what's come to the girl? Kind words, indeed! What for, I should like to know?"

"Oh! because of any thing—because you are alive," glancing round the room a little nervously.

"I tell you I'm not the sort, and I can't be wasting my time talking nonsense here because I'm alive, when I ought to be in bed and asleep. Besides, I'm not so took up with new faces as you seem to think. There, be quick and get into bed, do, and let me tuck you up before I go."

"As if that is not kind!" laughed Jean, hastily slipping off her dress and loosening her hair.

"You make short work with your prayers," said Martha, as the girl rose from her knees and sprang into bed. "Haven't you got any enemies to pray for?"

"No," sleepily. "What a nice soft bed!"

"Good-night, Martha, dear."

"Good-night," softly repeated Martha, looking down at the pure girlish face entering with a smile into the land of dreams. How ashamed would Martha have been could she have seen the expression of her own face at that moment! Martha, who prided herself upon having none of the weaknesses of ordinary mortals, to have her philosophy disturbed by a chit of a school-girl like this. She went quietly away, not noticing how careful she was in closing the door lest she should disturb the sleeping girl, and telling herself that to-morrow Jean must be made to understand that she had made a great mistake—there was nothing weak about Martha. "How in the world she came to think she could talk to me in that fashion beats me. Nobody ever attempted it before," she thought, curiously examining her face in the glass to see if any wonderful change had taken place in its expression, and coming to the satisfactory conclusion that any one must be daft indeed to think she was a sort you could talk love nonsense to. "Love in this house!" she added, turning away from the glass with a chuckle. "It will soon be starved out of here, I warrant! Martha dear, too! 'Good-night, Martha dear!' It's a good forty year since any one was silly enough to call me dear."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## MARTHA'S WEAKNESS.

JEAN had time for a run round the garden before the breakfast hour, and although she found it quite as dreary as it appeared from the windows—wilderness would have been a fitter name for it—she was all the better for the fresh morning air; coming in with a blooming face as the clock struck nine. She was received very cordially by the Miss Drakes, each expressing a hope that she had found her room comfortable and had slept well, smiling at the enthusiasm of her reply. For she had quite got over the previous night's nervousness, and the very gloominess of the place was beginning to have a sort of weird fascination for her. It was not like any other place she had known. You could picture no tragedies at the Grange; it was a dear old nest, made expressly for love to dwell in, and light and air were welcome guests in every corner of it. Every thing within and without treated you as a friend and took you into its confidence, the trees and flowers and birds being upon such sympathetic terms with each other that the birth of a rose seemed occasion for all sorts of chirpings and chattering and rustlings. But here every thing within the boundary of those frowning walls wore an air of mystery; the very shrubs in the garden looking solemnly reticent, as though conscious of something which it was necessary to keep from the knowledge of strangers. Jean's imagination was excited as it had never been before. She replied to Miss Barbara's politely expressed hope that she would find garden exercise sufficient by affirming that she should like it better than walking along roads. But when she went on to ask why the wall at the bottom of the garden was built so high, and the pretty stone temple had been half destroyed, there was a dead silence a moment or two, and she saw their faces darken, and knew that she had some way made a mistake.

Miss Barbara replied, coldly, "It is sufficient to say that it was necessary to build that wall, Miss Bell."

"As a testimony to the vindictiveness of the person who built it, Miss Bell," added Miss Drake.

"If only you were friends again," thought Jean, perceiving that the "making-up," as she in school-girl phrase termed it, had not come about on the previous night. In her ignorance, she imagined that she had happened to arrive in the midst of a quarrel between the sisters. She did not know that no word had been directly addressed by one to the other for between thirty and forty years.

Both ladies continued to be kind and courteous to her, and the little she did in the way of reading, playing, or what not,

was received in the best spirit. She did not find them very *exigeante* on the score of being amused; indeed, she was conscious that they were generally too much absorbed in their own reflections to hear what she was playing, or follow what she was reading. "I really do not know what they will want me for when they are friends again," she thought; beginning to feel uncomfortably conscious that the only real use they made of her was to talk at each other. But for this, her time passed pleasantly enough. During her intervals of leisure she was welcome to roam over the whole house, and dream over its treasures as much as she pleased, and she made for herself a quaint world of romance, from which she emerged with more and more difficulty when the time came to go on duty again. Then she found it still more difficult to think of Nugent Orme in the right way than she had done at Mrs. Brice's. Involuntarily her thoughts went out to him in connection with every thing that suggested aught that was great and good. Her fancy placed that helmet on his head and that breastplate over his shoulders, and saw him set forth, sword in hand, to conquer or die—had ever right such a champion! or she would picture him as he stood that day in the Grange woods, giving her up with the tender yearning in his eyes, and wonder if words had ever before sounded like that "Jean! Jean!" The color would spring to her cheeks, and the light to her eyes, as she would murmur, again and again, "Can I ever be poor or sad with that 'Jean! Jean!' to live upon?" Then would come the bitter remembrance, growing, alas! more bitter every day, now that he was Maud's husband. "Maud's husband," she repeated to herself, over and over again, as she feverishly paced the gloomy garden. But it was all of no use. If he was Maud's husband, he was Jean's hero. "What would he think of me if he knew?" she murmured, as she vainly strove to forget him. Fortunately for herself, she was obliged to gather back her thoughts when the time came for her to return to duty in the drawing-room again.

The only attempt which the Miss Drakes made at any thing in the way of amusement was in playing whist, one lady alternately taking dummy and the other Jean as partner, and the hours so spent were Jean's greatest trial. The game always culminated in so fierce a struggle for supremacy, and the subsequent triumph of the winner, and bitter speeches of the loser, were so painful to listen to, that Jean learned to dread the very sight of cards. But it was only a very little better when she was invited to read aloud, on the occasions when they were in the mood to listen to her. The books chosen were of the best, and the young girl read of great deeds told in thrilling words,

with heart exultant, cheeks aflame, and eyes brilliant with delight; or grew white and indignant over a tale of wrong. But, be the subject what it might, it always seemed to suggest some hidden meaning which gave offense to one or the other of her hearers.

"It is consoling to know that *some* who have the power to wound disdain to use it, is it not, Miss Bell? All people do not enjoy injuring others, you see."

"It must be very terrible to feel cruel," said Jean. For which she received a smile from Miss Drake, and a frown from Miss Barbara. At another time, "Deceit and treachery do not *always* succeed, you see, Miss Bell."

"It is a great pity if they ever do," bluntly replied Jean. "I never met with a deceitful person; but I am sure they must be dreadful to know."

"Do not be too sure you have never met one, Miss Bell," with a gracious smile from Miss Barbara, and a frown from Miss Drake, and so on, until the servants filed in to prayers, which were read by each sister in turn.

Martha had got into a habit of paying a visit to Jean's room the last thing every night, but she told herself that her only reason for doing so was because such a chit of a girl could not be trusted to see her candle safely out, and it was clearly her duty to look after her. But that last half-hour in the day was becoming very precious to the old woman, opening out to her as it did an entirely new experience, although she would have been highly indignant at being supposed to look forward to it. She watched Jean curiously as days passed on, beginning to ask herself, "What does she think of it now—will she be able to bear it?" But she put no questions in words, and Jean volunteered no information. Indeed, her reticence respecting the Miss Drakes, as compared with her frankness upon all other points, herself in particular, not a little surprised Martha. It had been just the reverse with most of the ladies who had acted as companions at Drayford House. While very curious to hear any thing about the Miss Drakes, and Martha considered a great deal too ready to talk about their defects, the ladies who had previously been there had not been very frank about their own affairs. "All they wanted you to know about them was that they had been accustomed to very grand society, and that it was a great come-down to be obliged to do any thing for money," thought Martha. She soon began to perceive a change creeping over Jean. But although the latter would not allow that there was any difference in her, and seemed surprised at Martha fancying there was, the woman could see that she was getting thinner and more feverish-looking, as though she wanted more fresh air.

"Have you been into the garden twice to-day?" she would ask, crossly.

"Yes."

Then, trying to keep the usual brusque tone, Martha said, "If you would like a walk across the meadows or by the river, I dare say the Miss Drakes wouldn't mind your going sometimes, if I went with you. You can't be sent prancing all over the country by yourself, of course; but I shouldn't mind going to see after you once or twice in a way."

"No, thank you, Martha, I don't care about it; it's less trouble walking in the garden," listlessly.

"Less trouble, indeed! What are you getting so fine and lackadaisical about?"

"Oh, nothing. I only feel a little tired sometimes. No, not of being here—I am only too glad to be here; tired of myself, you know."

"Well, you must know best what sort of a self you've got to be tired of, to be sure; but you won't make it any better by staring up at the stars in that fashion!"

For answer, the girl pulled Martha on to a chair and sat in her lap, twining her arms about the old woman's neck, and nestling against her withered cheek. "Every thing is so lovely to-night! Oh, Martha dear! let's go a little mad."

"There, for goodness' sake, get off my lap," with a faint pretense of pushing. "That comes of star-gazing. Well, I never expected any good to come out of it, and I ought to have known better than to let you waste your time staring up there."

"But it does me good—indeed, indeed it does; it is not that. Oh, Martha, I begin to wish I had been disappointed in love!"

"Why?" looking down into the yearning eyes piercing the distance.

"Because it would be much easier to bear than this. I can not help thinking of him, and being glad he loved me—terribly glad; and it gets worse and worse. At first—before I left Fernside—I thought I should soon get accustomed to think of him as her husband; but I can not, I can not!"

"Her husband! He's a married man, then?"

"I don't know; yes, I suppose so, by this time. He was engaged to my cousin, and I did not know it in time."

"He was a pretty sort of a man?"

"Don't blame him, Martha; indeed, indeed, he could not help it!"

Martha glanced down at the eloquent face, and in her heart of hearts thought that was quite possible.

"I let him see that I loved him, and then it all came out, and we had to give each other up."

"And now you are sorry you did it, and want him back again?"

"No; I could bear never seeing him again, if only I might go on loving him. But I

must not, and that's the trouble of it. Oh, Martha, dear, if you had only seen him!—no, seeing him would not have been enough. If you had but known him!" Then, gently pressing down Martha's eyelids with the tips of her fingers, she shyly added, "Don't you think 'Nugent' is a beautiful name? Would you mind whispering it just once, loud enough for me to hear?"

"No, indeed; I am not going to do any thing so silly. What have I got to do with whispering men's names, I should like to know! For Martha had quite made up her mind that he was not to be taken into her favor. She took offense at his very name, which, to Jean's dismay, she insisted was "outlandish, and not fit for a respectable man in a Christian country."

Nevertheless, Martha lingered a little longer than usual over the "tucking-up" process that night, and she found occasion to put the hair farther off Jean's face, as the latter was cozing down on her pillow; excusing herself by grumbling out that "girls had no notion how to make themselves comfortable." Jean fell asleep, half conscious that it was Martha's lips which last touched her cheek. Martha certainly looked very much ashamed of herself as she went to her own room that night.

"A pretty fool I'm making of myself!" she ejaculated, as she began her usual methodical process of preparing for rest. "Why I am so taken up with a bit of a girl like her, I can't think. Where's the sense of it, when she might, like the rest, be off any day?" For she began to suspect that Jean would not be able to bear the life at Drayford House for any length of time better than others had done. The constant coming and going of the lady companions had hitherto affected her very little. Indeed, she had frequently found a grim sort of amusement in speculating how long each was likely to remain. But the thought that Jean also might have to give up disturbed her terribly. How in the world would she be able to do without her? How could she go back to the old colorless life again? But she showed her anxiety in Martha fashion, by being a little crosser than usual to Jean. It was no use. From the first Jean had intuitively felt that she found favor in Martha's sight, and the sharp speeches and cross looks told for nothing in the balance against love. She was even daring enough to tax the old woman with loving her. Martha grumbled out a protest against being guilty of any such weakness. Miss Bell must think her very stupid, or she must think a fine deal of herself to suppose Martha was bound up in her. But, try as she might, she could not hide her anxiety at the change which she perceived to be creeping upon Jean.

"If there's any thing you want, for goodness' sake why can't you say so!" she would

say, crossly, after bringing all the little treats she could think of up to Jean in the bedroom, where the latter always found a cheerful fire burning to welcome her now. "Jane and Ann both say that you eat next to nothing now. You ain't beginning to get tired of being here, are you?" she would ask, again and again.

"Oh no, Martha, indeed, no! If I wanted to leave here, I could not. I have nowhere to go to. But I do not want to leave. I like being here, if I can only please the Miss Drakes. I enjoy living with the beautiful things—almost too much."

Martha shook her head a little doubtfully; she could not understand enjoying things too much, if you went beyond meat and pudding, and Jean's attempts to explain mystified her more than ever. Admiring things that made you cry was quite incomprehensible to Martha. It was as odd as saying she enjoyed going to church.

The Miss Drakes noticed nothing. They treated Jean with punctilious courtesy, but took not the slightest interest in her. In truth, they were too much absorbed in their own thoughts to go beyond the merest business relationship with any one. "A pleasant morning for the garden, Miss Bell;" or, "I hope you did not find it too cold to enjoy the exercise," expressed more than all the interest they took in her. She could not help perceiving that her replies were never noticed if they were heard.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### JEAN'S DISMISSAL.

ONE morning, after the customary greeting from the Miss Drakes and Jean's stereotyped reply, the latter forgot herself, and impulsively ejaculated,

"What a pity it was necessary to make the wall at the bottom of the garden so very high. Even an ugly view would be better than so much wall, would it not, Miss Drake?"

There was a dead silence for a moment or two. Miss Barbara sat frowning down at her mittens, and Miss Drake smiled. Then said the latter,

"I dare say you could hardly conceive it possible that any one could build that wall from malice—to shut out a beautiful view simply because another admired it, Miss Bell. Behind that wall there is one of the loveliest views of the winding river, with fine trees and a terrace, that no one can now use."

"Oh, how very unkind! Why, it is quite cruel to shut out any thing beautiful—wicked!"

"I quite agree with you, Miss Bell."





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one's suspicions mattered now. Besides  
the girl really believed her capable of be-  
what she was accused of, she was right in  
speaking.

"I do not blame you, Floyd, if you thought  
I was so wicked; it was right to be an-  
and I am glad you love your mistress—  
needs love so much. Oh, Floyd, be good  
her. If you are shocked, what must it  
to her to believe such a terrible thing!  
loved me, you know."

Jean passed the dumbfounded girl, w-  
down-stairs and out of the house—the  
steps to the cab-stand—where she engaged  
fy to take her to the railway station. T-  
she returned to the house again, went up  
her room, and hastily packed together  
small belongings, taking none of the m-  
gifts that had been lavished upon her ex-  
the locket containing Lady Roughton's m-  
ature. Slipping on her old black dress  
bonnet and cloak, she ran down-stairs ag-  
and got the man to fetch down her tr-  
All the available assistance in the h-  
was called to Lady Roughton; Sir Ar-  
had gone for a sail, and, without one w-  
of farewell, unnoticed and uncared-for, J-  
went her way.

## CHAPTER XL.

### "THE DARKNESS DEEPENS."

JEAN found a train just starting, and t-  
a ticket for the London terminus. "I  
Brice will take me back again," she thoug-  
She leaned back in the carriage and tried  
realize her position. But her temples w-  
throbbing painfully, and she was alternat-  
burning with fever or shivering with c-  
She found more and more difficulty in  
lecting her thoughts, which would stray  
er any trifle that attracted her eyes.  
sat gazing in a numb, far-off sort of wa-  
the country she was speeding through  
capable of realizing any thing very vivi-  
"Am I going to be ill?" she wonder-  
"What makes me like this? Why c-  
I cry, or something? and why does ev-  
thing whirl about so? Oh dear, how s-  
I am for myself!" It cost her a great ef-  
to claim her luggage when she arrived  
the terminus, and then there was the d-  
culty of taking a cab. Some way she m-  
aged to make the cabman understand  
directions she gave him, though he once  
twice reminded her that Chelsea was no  
Broadstairs. Then she was dimly consci-  
of being whirled through the noisy str-  
toward Chelsea. But what made Mrs. B-  
burst into tears at sight of her, when  
cabman beckoned her to the door, and v-  
did they make such a fuss lifting her abo-  
And why would not they let her lie  
sleep somewhere—on a chair—anywh-  
until she was just a little rested? If t-

ning, when the door opened and dinner was announced.

The lady on the left rose and led the way, her sister and Jean following. Another grand old room, furnished after the same style as the rest of the house, only a trifle more massively, in dining-room fashion, and with fine old pictures—mostly portraits of the Miss Drakes' ancestors—on the walls. Although this room was in the front of the house, the view from the windows was not more cheerful than that from the drawing-room—the only difference being that there was not quite so much distance between the windows and the high, frowning walls as at the back of the house.

"I wish there were not quite so much wall everywhere!" thought Jean. In the mean time, she had quite forgotten to note which was the elder sister again. "Now, which is Miss Drake?" she speculated uneasily, glancing from one to the other. "Oh, of course she is at the head of the table!" But when she addressed the lady sitting there as Miss Drake, she received a sharp rebuke from her. "I informed you that I am not Miss Drake, and I must beg you to remember it, Miss Bell."

"I will try," murmured Jean, apologetically.

The lady at the bottom of the table said, gently, "Your mistake was a very natural one, Miss Bell. It is not at all surprising that you should expect to see an elder sister in an elder sister's place."

"Unless you had reason to believe that the elder had forfeited her right to occupy it," sharply put in Miss Barbara. "Shall I send you some chicken, Miss Bell?"

"If you please," returned bewildered Jean. She noticed that each lady helped herself from the dish set before her, and that each had her own servant, who, except to attend upon Jean, did not leave her own side of the table. Even the sweets were, as the other courses, exactly the same at each end of the table, so that neither lady had to assist the other, or consult her wishes in any way. Both were manifestly gentlewomen, and studiously polite to Jean when she herself was in question; courteously sending whatever was best to her; and the dinner, though unpretending, was extremely good, as well as daintily dressed and served—the well-trained servants moving deftly and silently about their work. They were two middle-aged women, with the stolid look of respectability in their faces.

"We do not employ men-servants, you see, Miss Bell," said Miss Barbara, when dessert was set on, and the women had quit the room.

For lack of any thing else to say, Jean murmured a supposition that "Miss Barbara preferred women-servants."

"No, I can not say that I do to wait at ta-

ble. Until a certain date, we always kept men-servants, and found them more efficient in the work. But circumstances obliged us to discontinue employing them in this house. With the exception of the gardener, who is an elderly man, and does not come regularly, we do not employ men-servants."

"Indeed," said Jean, wondering what the circumstances were. Happening to glance at Miss Drake, she noticed that the color in her face was a great deal heightened.

With a smile upon her lips, Miss Barbara rose from the table and led the way to the drawing-room. There each lady took her seat by the fire; each having a reading-lamp placed upon her own table by her side, and this time Jean took care to note which was the elder and which the younger. Her own place was evidently intended to remain in the centre, between the two. Miss Barbara, who seemed to take the lead in the arrangements, politely bade Jean make herself at home with her surroundings. "My sister and I generally indulge in a nap after dinner, Miss Bell. Perhaps you would like to amuse yourself with the books, or you will find some fine engravings on that stand, if you prefer looking at them." Jean delightedly availed herself of the privilege. By the time tea was brought in, she had come to the conclusion that she was the most fortunate girl in all the world to be permitted to live in communion with such treasures. She was requested to make tea, an urn being brought in in the old-fashioned way, and each lady took it at her own separate table. Both continued very pleasant and kind in their bearing toward herself. "But how very odd they do not speak to each other!" thought Jean, as the evening wore on; "I really do not believe that I have heard them exchange a single word since I came." Moreover, she was beginning to feel uncomfortable under the impression that when she pleased one sister she displeased the other.

"As my sister doubtless took you into her confidence from the beginning, she will perhaps explain our daily habits and requirements to you, Miss Bell," gently said Miss Drake, when the tea equipage had been removed.

"Will you be good enough to relate exactly what took place at our interview, Miss Bell?" sternly said Miss Barbara. "I must beg of you to be as exact as possible, if you do not wish yourself to be misjudged and accused of all sorts of evil plotting as well as me."

"I was only told that I was engaged to act as companion to two ladies; that I was required to be truthful, self-controlled, and good-tempered; that the salary was to be forty pounds a year; and that if I did my best to be agreeable and useful the disadvantage of my not being able to give any reference would be looked over," said Jean.

"Miss Barbara has displayed her usual wisdom and penetration," said the elder lady, turning sarcastic eyes upon Jean's hot face.

Miss Barbara smiled. "Quite a compliment, is it not, Miss Bell? Wisdom and penetration! I do not often get the credit for possessing any good quality whatever; but after this I shall quite plume myself upon being almost an average human being. I may now go on to endeavor to give you some idea of our daily life, and what is expected of you. Unhappily there is a division in our house; deceit and treachery—"

"And lying and slandering," calmly from the elder.

"Have rendered it impossible that there can be the usual love and trust between relations—"

"Quite impossible!" in a quiet under-tone from the opposite side.

"But, as Christian women, we consider it our duty to forgive, if we can not forget, the past, and remain under the same roof. All that is expected of you is a strict neutrality, which, as you know nothing of the past, may be possible."

"Under that circumstance only!" firmly from the right.

"If my sister will allow me to proceed, Miss Bell, I may tell you we shall be glad to find you at the breakfast-table punctually at nine o'clock. Afterward exercise in the garden until eleven; reading until luncheon, at half-past one; garden exercise, or an occasional drive and needle-work until dinner; music, reading, and now and then a rubber at whist between tea and prayers. You can attend the church, where we have a pew, once on Sunday; my own and my sister's state of health prevents our going."

Jean bowed her acquiescence. It sounded pleasant and easy enough so far as she was concerned.

"Shall I play something now, Miss Drake?"

"Ask my sister, Miss Bell," replied the elder lady, stiffly.

"We are not very musical," said Miss Barbara; "but if you sing, my sister would probably like to hear a love song, only it must be something very sentimental."

"As my younger sister arrogates to herself the precedence in all things, pray sing first for her, Miss Bell; and if you know any such, I should suggest the topics jealousy and revenge as most congenial."

"I don't know any such songs," bluntly returned Jean. Then, after a few moments, she recollected that good-temper and self-control had been two things especially stipulated for, and went on more gently: "The little voice I have has not been much cultivated, and I only sing the simplest ballads; but I will play, if you will allow me."

She sat down to the piano and played

through the best of the school show-pieces she could remember, while the two ladies sat gazing with stony eyes into the fire. Afterward she went on to play some Scotch airs; but while softly going through "Should auld acquaintance be forgot," unconsciously lingering tenderly over the notes, her eyes happened to turn toward her employers, and to her consternation she perceived that they were each regarding her with stern eyes and frowning brows. But before she had time to perceive in what she had offended, a clock chimed ten, the door opened, and eight or nine servants entered the room. The elderly woman who had first received Jean carried in a large Bible and Prayer-book, placed them on the table by Miss Barbara, and then knelt down with the others, each before a chair, while that lady read prayers. Afterward the servants filed silently out again, and Jean stood waiting for her next instructions. They would be friends now—were probably only waiting until she was out of the way to make it up comfortably. As she hoped, she was dismissed, each lady shaking hands with her, and courteously expressing a wish that she would sleep well in her new home.

Greatly relieved, Jean took her candle and went her way. The great staircase and gallery were more sombre and weird-looking by the light of her solitary candle, and all sorts of fantastic threatening shapes seemed to spring out from the deep gulf of shadow as though to bar her progress. Then, when she had reached the gallery, she stood hesitating, afraid of opening the wrong door. But presently she saw some person advancing from the opposite end of the gallery, from where she afterward learned was the back staircase, and to her great relief the figure proved to be her first acquaintance, Martha.

"I am so glad," ejaculated Jean. "I do not know which is the right door."

"I thought you might be wanting something or another," replied Martha, ungraciously, opening one of the doors.

"What a very large room at night, isn't it?"

"I don't see that it's any larger than it was in the day."

"But it looks so much larger, you know; so dark in the corners," with a little involuntary shudder.

Martha gave her a little side-look. "You oughtn't to bring such things as nerves here."

"I do not think I am a nervous girl generally, but I'm not accustomed to such great places. They feel a little cold."

"You can have a fire. There is no stint of any thing here. Things are not done by halves in this house"—with the low chuckle which served Martha for a laugh.

"No, thank you. It is not that sort of cold."



"A letter for mamma, Emma?" said Maud, taking it from the hand of the servant on her way to find her mistress. Maud went into the drawing-room, where she read and re-read the letter thoughtfully through. She had just put it into the fire when her mother entered the room. "News?" she eagerly ejaculated. "Emma said there was a letter."

"I wish you would try to overcome that absurd notion, mamma, fancying that every little tradesman's bill must be a letter from her. Why in the world can not you be satisfied with what she told you herself? She must be the best judge of what she prefers to do. If she had changed her mind, of course she would write, which she has not done," with a little sigh of relief at being able to be so far true.

Mrs. Poynder wandered aimlessly out of the room again. She never rested long in one place now; and Maud sat down to reply to Miss Bowles's communication.

When Thomas Brice presented himself at the appointed time at Ivy Lodge, he was admitted to Miss Bowles's presence at once; she held an open letter in her hand.

"You were quite under a mistake, my good man, in supposing that Miss Bell's friends were at all desirous of communicating with her or to receive any information about her. I will read you the letter I have received upon the subject, suppressing names, since the lady manifestly objects to be in any way troubled again upon the matter."

"In reply to Miss Bowles's communication, Mrs. P. presents her compliments and thanks for the trouble that has been taken, and begs to state that she has not the slightest desire to know Jean Bell's present address, or to interfere with that person's future movements in any way whatever! Jean Bell has chosen to refuse the home charitably offered to her, affirming that she preferred taking her own way for the future; and Mrs. P. feels bound to add that she does not at all regret Jean Bell's decision, and very decidedly declines to have any thing further to do with the matter."

In a fever of anxiety lest she should be drawn into any thing derogatory to Ivy Lodge, where respectability had reigned supreme so many years, Miss Bowles hastened, on her side, to inform Thomas Brice that she could not upon any account be again troubled upon the subject. Personally, she had no desire to see any more of Jean Bell. She had not a word to say to her disadvantage respecting the time she had been domiciled at Ivy Lodge, but she must altogether decline to be mixed up with any thing which might have taken place since. Jean Bell had evidently offended her friends; and if she was desirous to reinstate herself in their favor, the proper and only course was to

write to them, and ask forgiveness for her error, whatever it might have been."

Thomas Brice turned from the gate of Ivy Lodge a disappointed man; as angry and disappointed as a gold-seeker who fancies he has come upon a rich vein of wealth, and finds it altogether valueless. Poor Mrs. Brice could not understand how it was that her husband so suddenly lost all interest in their lodger. Jean was less than ever a lady in his estimation. "We never had a lodger that paid so well before, you know, Thomas," would say his wife, when he made some surly remark about Jean.

"We must take care we don't lose by her in the long run," he grumbled.

"I almost dread going to Miss Gilbert's again," said Jean, in consultation with her friend. "I am afraid she will be so vexed with me about having left Miss Drake's after stretching a point, as she said, to help me to get the situation."

"Why not try another agent, miss? There must be more than one, isn't there?"

It seemed a bright suggestion. After a moment's thought over it, Jean replied: "I really think that would be a good plan. A young lady I met at Miss Gilbert's told me that another agent lives in — Street, which is not far from there."

So it was decided, and Jean set forth the next morning in better spirits, quite relieved at not being obliged to go to the old place again. Poor Jean, she little supposed the welcome she would have received there! Old Martha sat waiting in Miss Gilbert's office morning after morning, as patiently as she could in the hope of seeing Jean, for her dear mistresses were now quite as desirous as herself to get their sunshine back.

Jean found a lady quite as ready to transact business, if not quite so disposed to "stretch a point," as Miss Gilbert. After entering Jean's name upon the books, and receiving the fee, Mrs. Wyman went on, pleasantly:

"I need not tell you that your want of reference is a serious drawback, Miss Bell."

"No; I know it."

"Still there is a chance, you know," gathering up the five shillings.

Yes; Jean knew that too. But she went morning after morning, waiting in vain for the "chance," while her small store of money was rapidly diminishing again. Mrs. Brice did her best to cheer and encourage her, but Jean was beginning to have an uncomfortable suspicion that the husband's civility would only last until her purse was empty. She eked out her money as carefully as she could, trying to moderate her appetite, and buying the same coarse, cheap food as the Brices lived upon; but she was drawing terribly near to her last sovereign.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## LADY ROUGHTON.

JEAN was beginning to grow quite weary of sitting day after day unnoticed in the agent's waiting-room—so hopeless, that when at last her "chance" seemed to come she was completely taken by surprise. On her way out of the office one morning, a lady happened to glance in Jean's direction. Her first glance was merely a passing one at the young girl sitting apart from others; then she noticed the hopeless expression in the pale, thin face, and then something else! Her eyes dilated, fastening themselves upon Jean's face, and she stood as if spell-bound. Jean flushed up a little uncomfortably under such close scrutiny. The stranger murmured something that was meant for an apology, drew down her veil, and passed on. But only as far as the door. As though irresistibly attracted to the vicinity again, she slowly returned, her eyes fixed in the same earnest way upon the young girl's face.

Jean looked her surprise, and the other said, in a low, uneven voice,

"I beg your pardon; but—I thought I knew you. You are so—like some one I—once knew."

Jean bowed with a slight little smile. No hope of any one claiming acquaintance with her! She almost pitied the girl, whoever she might be, that was like her. The lady turned away and went into the inner room. She whispered a few words to Mrs. Wyman, then sunk, white and motionless, into a chair. But she was presently able to make a faint apology for the trouble she was giving. She was not in very good health, and had ventured out earlier in the day than usual. Would Mrs. Wyman be good enough to ask the young lady to call upon her in Berkeley Square. "Or," she added, hesitatingly, "possibly Miss—Bell would not mind driving home with me now. She is seeking some kind of engagement, did not you say, Mrs. Wyman?"

"Yes, Lady Roughton," replied Mrs. Wyman; "but—"

"Will you be good enough to introduce me to her?" in a tone which, though gentle enough, was accustomed to be obeyed.

"Will you come this way, Miss. Bell? Lady Roughton wishes to speak to you."

Jean slowly advanced, expecting it was only to go through the usual questioning with the usual results. Lady Roughton's eyes were downcast as she said, in a low, tremulous voice,

"Mrs. Wyman tells me you are seeking an—engagement—of some kind—Miss Bell?"

"Yes; I am hoping to find a situation as governess, Lady Roughton."

Then, to fill up the pause which followed (Lady Roughton seemed incapable of speaking), Mrs. Wyman said to Jean, "This lady

is requiring a companion. Did you not tell me that you have had one engagement of that kind, Miss Bell?"

"Yes," said Jean. Then, to save time and trouble, she added, "Does Lady Roughton know that I can offer no reference, Mrs. Wyman?" Why should she give this gentle-looking woman the trouble to frame her excuses gracefully, unequal as she seemed to make the effort, thought Jean. "I am quite willing to take the customary polite speech for granted, and you need not look so anxious about it. What a dear, sweet face you have!"

It was a very sweet face. Ill as she looked, there were the traces of great loveliness in Lady Roughton's thin face. She was dressed with rich simplicity, though its fashion was a little too old for her age. Every thing about her seemed to tell of wealth, and utter carelessness, not to say scorn, of it.

"Would you mind accompanying me home now, Miss Bell?" asked Lady Roughton, in the same low, nervous voice, and with averted eyes; though Mrs. Wyman noticed that they were turned upon Jean whenever Jean's were turned from her.

"Not in the least," said Jean; although in some surprise at the request after her statement about having no reference. "It is not very far, perhaps?"

"Only to Berkeley Square. I am not very strong to-day, and I could speak to you better—after a little rest at home—Miss Bell, if you do not mind the trouble."

"Oh no; of course not, Lady Roughton," returned Jean, mentally adding, "But I wish you had understood at once about the reference." Then, as Lady Roughton weakly rose from her seat, "May I offer you my arm; I fear you have not quite recovered." Lady Roughton seemed glad to avail herself of the support.

"I do not lean too heavily, I hope," she murmured, glancing a moment up into the girl's face, as her fingers closed round the firm, round arm.

"Oh no, indeed! Pray do not mind leaning; I am a very strong girl." It was but a few steps to the carriage, but it took some time to get to it.

Lady Roughton spoke no word to her companion during the short drive—lying back with closed eyes, white and still, among the cushions.

"Can there be any chance for me?" wondered Jean. But she was afraid to indulge a hope. "After she has talked to me, it will be the same as the others; very kind, very sorry, but—'Good-morning, Miss Bell.' She looks so nice too; and it is always harder to bear from the nice ones!"

In her excitement, Jean did not notice the exterior of the house they stopped at; but, as soon as she got into the entrance hall, she saw that the owner must be rich as well as

titled. At a whispered word from his mistress, one of the tall footmen threw open a door to the left of the hall, and ushered Jean into a noble-looking dining-room, begging her to wait there for a few minutes.

Jean was alone fifteen or twenty minutes; but for her watch she would have thought it was at least an hour. "And all for nothing!" she murmured. "This does not look a house that could do without references!" gazing around her. "I should not think any thing without a character ever got in here."

A well-mannered, pleasant-looking lady's-maid, attired in a neat-fitting black silk dress, and pretty lace cap, opened the door, and said, respectfully,

"My mistress is extremely sorry to have kept you so long waiting, ma'am. She has had one of her bad attacks, but will be glad to see you now, if you will kindly come to her own room."

Jean followed the maid up the thickly carpeted stairs, past a grand suite of drawing-rooms, on the first floor, to an exquisitely furnished boudoir. Lady Roughton was lying back in a low chair near the fire. With a faint smile she signed to Jean to take a seat by her side.

"You need not wait, Floyd."

The maid placed a small table, upon which were some essences, a fan, hand-screen, etc., and then noiselessly quit the room. But when they were left alone, to Jean's great surprise, her companion seemed in no haste to commence a conversation. If that could have been possible, Jean would almost have fancied that she seemed embarrassed. Presently she ventured to say, "I hope you are feeling better, Lady Roughton?"

"Thank you, yes." Then, with downcast eyes, she added, "Mrs. Wyman told me that your name is Bell—Jean Bell—was she right?"

"Yes; that is my name, the only one I have now."

"Now? You are too young to be married. How came you to change your name? What other had you?"

"I would rather not say, if you will excuse me, Lady Roughton," replied poor Jean.

"You must tell me!" ejaculated Lady Roughton, bending eagerly forward; "I—I beg of you to tell me!"

Jean looked surprised. What did her other name matter to Lady Roughton? Then she repeated, hesitatingly, "I would rather not say."

"Do not be afraid to confide in me," pleaded the elder woman; "I am not asking from vulgar motives. Indeed, you may trust to me."

"I am sure I am not a bit afraid of that," returned Jean. "I feel as though I could tell you any thing, Lady Roughton. My father's name was Raymond, and—"

"What! Raymond: where did he live? what was his Christian name?" Lady Roughton was staring at Jean now with wildly dilating eyes.

"He lived in India, and his name was Oliver Raymond," promptly replied Jean. Then, terrified at the effect of her words, she exclaimed, "Oh, Lady Roughton, did you know my father?"

"I—no—no."

"You are ill!" and Jean sprang toward the bell.

"No; do not ring."

"But what can I do?" Jean caught up some eau-de-Cologne. "May I?"

A faint smile ("Ah, what a smile!" thought Jean) as she softly bathed the invalid's temples. Presently the face grew a little less ashen white, and two or three great tears rolled from beneath the downcast lids.

"Are you feeling a little better, Lady Roughton?" asked Jean, kneeling down before her, and chafing the cold hands between her own warm palms.

Lady Roughton bent her head.

"I am so very, very sorry! You had not recovered sufficiently to see me, had you?"

"Will you put thirty drops from that smallest bottle into the glass with some water for me?"

Jean carefully measured out the required quantity, the other's eyes greedily devouring her face the while, and gave the glass into the trembling hands. Then, after a few moments' silence, she asked,

"Had I not better come another time, Lady Roughton?"

"Do not go; I shall be able to speak to you presently, after resting a while. You will find some books on that table."

Jean took one, and sat down by the window, but her anxiety prevented her taking in the sense of what her eyes rested upon. It seemed an age before the invalid spoke again to her. Then she said, gently, "Miss Raymond!"

Jean put down the book, and went toward her.

"I am very sorry, but I am afraid I must give up the idea of your coming to live with me. But I must not lose sight of you; you must promise to—to—"

"Do not let it distress you, Lady Roughton. I know what you mean, only you are so kind that you do not like saying it. But I had not any hope from the first, so I am not disappointed—not much. I can not expect to get any really good engagement without being able to give any reference, certainly not such a home as this. Every body tells me that there is only the very smallest chance of my getting any thing."

"Do they—do they tell you that? Are you sure?" eagerly.

"Yes," returned Jean, "I have seen num-

bers of ladies who were afraid to engage me on that account. Some quite as kind and sorry for me as yourself."

Lady Roughton was looking any thing but sympathetic now, almost as though she were pleased, thought wondering Jean.

"But you are not without friends? Excuse me, had your father no relations?"

"Yes, but they did not care much for me after he died, and something came out about my mother. That was one cause, and there was another which I will not trouble you about."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are alone in the world, without friends or money?"

"I have one friend, who is the carpenter's wife where I am lodging, and I have only one pound fourteen and sixpence in the world," replied Jean, a little brusquely. Why did the other seem so pleased about her friendlessness after declining to engage her? Was she really as kind as she had first appeared to be? "Good-morning, Lady Roughton; I hope you will soon be better."

"Wait."

Lady Roughton sat with her hands tightly clasped, and Jean saw that her lips were moving. Then she looked up, and with the tears streaming down her face, held out her hand to Jean.

"Stay with me."

Jean was a little bewildered. "Come to live here, do you mean, Lady Roughton?"

The latter bowed her head.

"Do you really wish it?" questioned Jean, unable to understand why the other had altered her mind.

Lady Roughton's eyes fell beneath the girl's gaze, and she replied, in a low, broken voice, "You say that you are poor and friendless, and would not readily find a home?"

"Yes."

"Then come here."

"Oh, Lady Roughton, you will take me because of it! How good of you—how very good! What a fortunate girl!"

"Hush; can you send for your luggage, or must you go for it?"

"I must go to say good-bye to my dear, kind Mrs. Brice, who has been like a good mother to me. And though they are so poor that they will terribly miss my few shillings a week, she will rejoice to hear of my good fortune."

"God bless her for her goodness to—the friendless! Will you give this to her from me?" taking a note from an emblazoned velvet case on the table, and putting it into Jean's hand.

The latter's eyes opened wide. "Ten pounds!" she ejaculated, in great astonishment.

"I have so much more money than I want," a little confusedly and apologetically explained Lady Roughton. "and I have not

other people's opportunities for going among the poor." Then, seeing that Jean could not get over the surprise, she added, "But perhaps ten pounds is too much to give at one time. Will you give her these five sovereigns?"

"How very kind! She will indeed be grateful."

"I will order the carriage, and you will not stay longer than you can help, will you?" said Lady Roughton, now apparently more reluctant to let Jean go than she had previously been to let her remain.

"I will be as quick as I can; but do not order the carriage, Lady Roughton. It could hardly get into our street, and Sissy and Susy, Mrs. Brice's little girls, to whom I have been accustomed to tell fairy tales, would fancy I had turned out to be a fairy myself," laughed Jean.

Lady Roughton touched a bell by her side, and said to the maid who obeyed the summons, "Tell one of the men to get a cab for Miss Bell, Floyd, and send the housekeeper to speak to me about a room. Miss Bell is coming to stay with me."

"Was ever such good fortune!" thought happy Jean, as she was being rapidly driven toward Mrs. Brice's. The latter was unfeignedly glad to hear of her dear Miss Bell's good fortune, and, when the five pounds were put into her hands, was quite overcome with joy, sobbing out all sorts of grateful messages to the kind lady.

"Five pounds! Why, it was quite a fortune! There would be the taxes, and the rent, and every thing set straight for ever so long! And it's all come through you, Miss Bell, dear! Every bit of happiness I've had for many a long year has come through you!"

With Mrs. Brice's help, Jean's small wardrobe was soon packed in the trunk.

"It is not much of a good-bye, this time, you know," said Jean, giving her friend a last kiss on the door-step. "I shall not be so far away as before, and will come to see you as often as ever I can. Good-bye, baby dear. Be kind to mother, Sissy and Susy," nodding and smiling out of the cab window at them until it turned the corner of the street.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### WONDERLAND.

THE tall footman looked superciliously down at the battered little trunk and bag which constituted the new-comer's luggage. Jean was the first lady companion that had arrived there, but Robert came to the conclusion that companions must be a "poor lot" if they hadn't got more belonging to them than had this one.

Jean was conducted to a large, cheerful,

luxuriously furnished bedroom. "I shall begin to think I have found a fairy god-mother in real earnest at last!" was her mental ejaculation, as she noted the pretty work and writing tables, well-chosen little collection of books, etc.

Then Floyd tapped at the door, and came in to offer her services in such a matter-of-course, smiling way. Jean did not know that she had just had ten pounds a year added to her wages for those especial smiles. She shook out Jean's best dress, and, although the crape was getting a little rusty, rightly estimated its original value.

"Ten pounds, if a penny," thought Floyd, with artistic appreciation. "Cambric and—yes, real Valenciennes. If it is all getting a little worn, it's been made for a lady in the beginning; I can see that with half an eye, and it won't be like demeaning one's self to do for one of the common people." For Floyd prided herself upon not having yet accepted service with common people, and had made a mental reservation in accepting the ten pounds. If the new-comer should not come up to Floyd's standard of what a lady should be, Lady Roughton must be respectfully but firmly informed that not for twice the sum offered could Floyd wait upon her. But Jean and her belongings, few as they were, satisfied Floyd.

"Lady Roughton thought you might probably prefer sitting here sometimes to being in the drawing-rooms, and bade me say that it shall be better arranged as soon as possible—when she knows what you would like."

"Lady Roughton is very kind, but I do not think it can be better," said Jean.

"It is a cheerful room, is it not, ma'am, with its look over the square. It has the same view as her ladyship's sitting-room, which opens into it by that door. She thought you would feel less lonely near to her. She very rarely uses the drawing-rooms; her health does not admit of receiving company, and Sir Arthur always dines at his club, and is out in the evenings now."

"Sir Arthur—Lady Roughton's husband?" Jean had not given a thought to the possibility of there being a husband.

"Yes, ma'am. Didn't you know her ladyship is married?"

"It did not occur to me."

"My mistress hopes you will be able to amuse yourself, ma'am. This is not one of her best days, and going out has made her rather worse, I think. She bade me tell you that she has ordered dinner to be prepared by five o'clock, as she thought you might prefer that hour to-day, and begs you will excuse her until the evening, when she may be better for the rest she is taking."

Floyd would have been in the wildest astonishment could she have known how her mistress was resting at that moment. Lady Roughton was now pacing the room

with hurried, uneven steps, wildly wringing her hands, and now casting herself down on to the ground in the utter abandonment of shame and misery.

At five o'clock Jean was informed that dinner was on the table, and Floyd conducted her to the hall, where a footman took charge of her, ushering her into the great dining-room with official solemnity.

Dinner was elaborately laid for one, and the footman stationed himself behind her chair.

"Oh dear!" thought Jean, with a glance at the elaborate preparations, and the huge figure in livery.

"If, as Mrs. Floyd says, there's to be extra pay, well and good. I'll bring myself down to it for a time," thought Robert. But the effort it cost him was very apparent indeed. His languid way of offering any thing might have suggested extreme physical weakness, had there been no other cause for his feeling inconvenienced by its weight. Fortunately for herself, Jean was more hungry than nervous, and she partook of the dainty dishes presented to her with some enjoyment, Hercules notwithstanding. He had just placed dessert (Lady Roughton had given orders for Miss Bell to be treated as an honored guest) upon the table, and, to her great relief, quit the room, when she heard sounds of an arrival. The hall door was opened and shut; a quick tread sounded outside; the door of the room in which she sat was unceremoniously flung open; and a gentleman entered with his hat on, and a sheaf of papers in his hand. "The brougham at seven, Robert." His eyes fell upon Jean, and he stood for a moment or two gazing at her in dumb amazement. Blushing deeply, she half rose from her seat, not knowing what to say or do. He took off his hat, murmured an apology, and left the room again. A minute afterward he re-entered.

"I must introduce myself, if you will allow me, Miss Bell."

"You are Sir Arthur?" she said, bowing.

"Yes. Pray do not let me disturb you. I only returned to apologize for my abruptness just now."

"I had finished," she said, moving toward the door, eager to make her escape as quickly as possible.

He held open the door for her, with as grand a bow as he would make to a duchess, thought Robert, who, from his standpoint in the hall, had observed his master's courtesy.

"Poor Mary!" mused Sir Arthur. "I hoped she meant to engage some useful middle-aged person! She can hardly expect a girl like that to settle down to life here. It was not wise to let Miss Bell come, if she herself desired it."

Sir Arthur Roughton was a tall, slightly built, distinguished-looking man, somewhat

under forty years of age; his too delicately and sharply defined features typifying race—race slightly degenerated—rather than strength. Almost the same might be said of his mental qualities. Clear and incisive as it was, his intellect wanted breadth. But if his highest conceptions were not grand, his lowest were not vile. His dependents spoke of him with respect. "He was high, was Sir Arthur, and you had to be careful—it didn't do to say a word too many in answering him." But though he was never familiar with dependents, those who served him faithfully found him considerate, and even anxious for their well-being, and all were proud of him as one of the right sort—"a born gentleman."

Since Lady Roughton had become a confirmed invalid, and had had her separate apartments, he was as scrupulously attentive, and regardless of her comfort, as he had ever been. She was supposed to be a little older than her husband—she looked years older—but that might be attributed to ill-health and a temperament which appeared to be a not naturally cheerful one. She never went into society nor received any visitors, leading a silent, solitary life in her own suite of rooms.

Until succeeding to the baronetcy and large estates, which fell to him in consequence of a succession of unexpected deaths in the family, it was rumored that Sir Arthur had not been a rich man, and had always lived abroad. This was supposed to account for the fact of Lady Roughton having no friends in England. When about twenty, a subaltern with his regiment in India, Sir Arthur Roughton had suddenly sold out of the army, and left the country. After which he was only heard of at rare intervals by his friends, living upon his small income at different continental cities, and keeping out of the way of English residents or visitors. Even after his succession to the estates he remained abroad, leaving the management of them to agents for nearly three years. But a few months previously to this date, he and Lady Roughton had suddenly arrived at Roughton Park, and Sir Arthur had assumed the duties and responsibilities of his position. He had been readily welcomed by men of his class. His means and position were too influential in the county he represented for him to be ignored, had he been less desirable than he was as a companion; but it came to be understood by their wives that Lady Roughton's health did not permit of paying or receiving visits, and civilities were exchanged upon card-board to the content of all parties. It was considered odd that no one knew any thing about the antecedents of the wife; "but no doubt Lady Roughton had adopted the wisest course under the circumstances, and her seclusion prevented

many unpleasant little complications which might otherwise have arisen," said society. They had now taken up their permanent residence in town, that Lady Roughton might have the benefit of being near the best physicians, though Sir Arthur had been informed that their greatest skill could only smooth her way to the grave. It was the opinion of many of those about her that Lady Roughton did not sufficiently appreciate the luxuries with which she was surrounded. It was not suffering which caused her to be so regardless of her surroundings. She suffered very little as a rule, appearing to fade gently day by day, and some of the medical men consulted believed that she might, at any rate, prolong her life if she cared to do so. But she very evidently did not desire it. All their suggestions were disregarded; she took an airing less and less frequently, and declined to be amused in any way, seeming to take not the slightest interest in any body or any thing. It had been only to satisfy her husband, to whom the doctors had suggested the advisability of her having a cheerful lady companion, that she made an effort and paid a visit to the agent's that day. She would just set his mind at rest by going, but she had quite made up her mind beforehand not to find any lady who would suit her. The very idea of a companion was intolerable to her. Before paying his accustomed visit that afternoon (Sir Arthur spent half an hour in his wife's room every day), he sent to know if she would receive him.

"Not one of your best days, I fear, Mary," bending down to give the customary kiss upon her brow, but not at all disturbed at finding a hand-screen in the way. The kiss had been offered, and that was enough. Whatever he had once been, Sir Arthur Roughton was not very *exigente* in the matter of kisses now. He seated himself, and calmly went on, "You have soon succeeded in finding a companion. I was so astonished, that I was abrupt to Miss Bell when I found her in the dining-room just now. But I inquired of Robert, and made the *amende* as well as I could."

"I—she was waiting at the office, and—when I found she was only staying in lodgings, I thought it just as well she should come here at once," replied Lady Roughton, speaking mechanically, her eyes fastened upon the screen in her hand.

"Oh, of course; I hope you will find her companionable. I do not know much about lady companions; but would not you have found an older and more experienced woman more useful to you, Mary? Is not Miss Bell too young for such an office?"

"She did not think so."

"But was it quite wise to allow her to decide? This is hardly the place for a young girl like—"

A faint cry from Lady Roughton. The color deepened in her husband's face. "Mary! Surely you can not think me capable of—of meaning—"

"No, I ought to know you are not capable of any thing ungenerous. I do know it." Then she presently added, in a low, quivering voice, "But I feel that it was not right to—let her come. I was miserably, selfishly weak!"

"No, no; do not say that. We must hope she will be induced to stay, and do our best to make things as cheerful as we can for her. It will certainly be pleasant to see her about the house. She is very nice-looking—something, the turn of her head or expression of the eyes—I hardly know what, reminded me a little of yourself at her age. Anyhow, she looks very refined, and more unhackneyed than one expects a companion by profession to be. She is quite a gentlewoman, though; only just emerged from the school-room, I presume. Although she was a little nervous at my sudden interruption, it was not the nervousness of ill-breeding. Intelligent, too, if her face speaks truly."

He spoke at length, desirous to make his wife satisfied with what she had done, and openly, as an honorable man can be open in his admiration of a beautiful woman.

"I am glad you approve of Miss Bell," gently replied his wife.

"I hope you made a liberal arrangement with her, Mary! A few pounds more or less are of no importance, you know. What salary did you offer—a hundred?"

"I forgot. I have not mentioned any thing about salary yet."

"Not mentioned salary! And did not she?"

"She forgot, too, I suppose."

"Not a very business-like beginning," he said, smilingly. "She certainly does not give you the idea of being accustomed to bargains. But she may safely depend upon you to do what is right."

In truth, Lady Roughton really had forgotten the business part of the question, and, oddly enough, this remembrance that it had to be done was painful to her, her husband's *carte-blanche* notwithstanding. It seemed as though she suddenly realized some new difficulty.

When Jean was seated with Lady Roughton that evening, and had, in the fullness of her heart, tried to give some expression to her thankfulness for her good fortune, the other slowly and hesitatingly approached the subject.

"There was no mention made of—of remuneration between us this morning, Miss Bell. I do not know what you have been in the habit of receiving?"

"Mine have been such funny habits, Lady Roughton," smilingly replied Jean. "I have had only one situation, and that lasted but a few weeks."

Then, feeling that she ought not to expect such munificent pay as forty pounds a year, she did not name the sum Miss Drakes had agreed to give; adding, "I shall be satisfied with very little."

"I presume you only want sufficient to—to procure clothes, and so forth?" which certainly appeared a little mean on Lady Roughton's side, after her husband's hint about being liberal, if she had not another and deeper motive for not wishing to give Jean much in the way of salary. It was in such contrast with her ready offer of ten pounds for Mrs. Brice, too.

"That is all," cheerfully returned Jean.

"And you do not care about purchasing your own things, I dare say; so that you have what you require?"

"Oh no; not in the least! I have not been accustomed to buy my own clothes, and I should not know what things ought to cost, Lady Roughton. I have never even bought myself a pair of gloves."

"Then you will consent, perhaps, to accept my promise that you shall have everything a gentlewoman could require, without my giving you any fixed sum, Miss Bell?"

"Quite," said Jean.

"I am a little peculiar, perhaps, in—in not liking to give any thing in the way of fixed payment to you—to one in your position," hesitated Lady Roughton, by way of explanation.

"I am quite willing to leave every thing to you, Lady Roughton," said Jean, though a little astonished, too. Had she met with another eccentric person? Well, perhaps it was only eccentric people who wanted companions. And, really, what a home she had found! It would be quite wicked not to be satisfied. Though this was not so full of romance as Drayford House, apparently not containing so many ghosts of the past, it was more luxurious and comfortable.

Lady Roughton thought a little, then made another attempt at explanation. It was her whim to provide for her companion out of her own income, and she could do that more easily if Miss Bell would let her spend it in her own way, repeating that the latter would find herself furnished with all she needed. Jean heartily acquiesced, begging her to say no more about the matter, but do just as she pleased. Afterward, Lady Roughton lay back in her chair, holding a screen before her face, and speaking very little.

Jean was just sufficiently fatigued after her day's excitement to enjoy dreaming away the evening in a low cozy by the fire. With the understanding that her present employer was an invalid, there was not the same discomfort in silence which there had been with the Miss Drakes.

But twice or thrice, when she ventured to steal a glance in that direction, she met Lady

Roughton's eyes fixed upon her with an expression which greatly puzzled her. They were withdrawn in an instant, a faint color tinged the thin cheeks. "She is wondering what sort of a girl I really am," thought Jean. "I wish she would ask questions, and let me tell her all about myself, and then she would know the worst. How funny to be sitting in state here, among all this grandeur, when only last night I was mending the children's socks in dear Mrs. Brice's little parlor!"

But Jean was dismissed at ten o'clock with a quiet good-night, and sent to her room, believing herself as much an enigma to Lady Roughton as the latter was to her. "She seems a little distant and cold in her manner," thought Jean, "and yet there is a something. I feel sure she can be very kind sometimes—more than kind. Her eyes had such a tender, loving look in them when she fancied I was not looking." She awoke in the night, half conscious that some one was in the room hovering about her bedside, and once it seemed as though lips were touching her hand which lay outside the coverlet. But she soon persuaded herself that she must have been dreaming, and fell into healthy slumber again.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

"SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR."

FLOYD came into Jean's room in the morning to offer her services, and the latter did not suffer in her estimation by declining them. If she had been only half a lady, she would have accepted, thought Floyd. She informed Jean that her mistress took breakfast in her own room, and thought that perhaps Miss Bell would like to take hers with Sir Arthur, at half-past nine.

"It would have been all the pleasanter without Sir Arthur," thought Jean, with a wry face. "But I suppose I have to be his companion when Lady Roughton does not want me, so I must do my best to be agreeable."

She was a great deal relieved to find that the effort was not required. After a few polite words, which did not tax her powers in the way of reply, his attention became absorbed by the numerous letters and pamphlets and notices, which had arrived by the morning's post. Nevertheless, he was between-while conscious that it was a pleasant contrast to the daily monotony of the meal to have Jean sitting there, so fresh and bright, attending to his wants. How much grace and color her girlish beauty lent to the dull room, and how simple and free from any thing like affectation was her bearing!

"It is very pleasant to have a lady here, Miss Bell," he said, when at length, to her

great relief, he had finished his last cup of coffee, and she rose from the table. "My poor wife has not been able to come down so long; I feel quite obliged to you for giving me my coffee."

"I thought I had to," said Jean.

"I trust no one gave you that impression," he replied, courteously.

"Oh no; but I haven't been much used to being a companion, and I thought perhaps I was expected to be yours when Lady Roughton did not require my services."

He looked, and for the moment was too utterly astonished to be able to reply. But there she was, with her clear, honest, brown eyes looking straight up into his face, and he had to say something. So he replied, as gravely as he could, "You will not be taxed in that way, Miss Bell, beyond giving me my coffee, if you do not mind doing so, in the morning. I hope you will find some congenial amusement here to while away your leisure. If you read, my library is at your service, and my wife is a subscriber for the new works. There are two or three pianos about the place, and I will have a harp brought up from Roughton. Then, I hope you will prevail upon Lady Roughton to take drives with you, or, if not, remember there is a carriage always at your service. Except in the square, of which the servants will give you the key, or when you drive to the Gardens, walking exercise will not be advisable, I suppose?"

Jean murmured her gratitude. "I shall have too many pleasures," she thought, as she went upstairs, staying a few minutes to look at the suite of beautifully furnished drawing-rooms, which no one used, on her way. "It would be strange, indeed, if I could not amuse myself here!" she said, as she took note of the numerous aids around her. Then her pretty room, with its cheerful view of the square, and prettily laid-out centre garden, which was to be her exercise ground. "And books and music, too; oh yes, indeed! I think we shall be able to amuse ourselves. And you are to be my writing-table, I suppose, my dear; well, I will write letters to myself rather than not use you. Or, what do you think of my opening a correspondence between my pet authors and the fairies, and making these pigeon-holes their post-office? We shall find out all sorts of things that way, you know."

Lloyd tapped at the door: "Lady Roughton's compliments, and she will be very pleased to see you when you are disengaged, Miss Bell."

Jean went at once into the next room. She was received with a faint though kindly smile by Lady Roughton.

"Yes, I am better, thank you. I hope you slept well, and liked your room, Miss Bell?"



"Yes, indeed, Lady Roughton; every thing is so much nicer than I could hope for."

The latter glanced a moment at the bright face, so pure and fresh-looking in the morning light, and then cast down her eyes. Presently, she said, in a low, hesitating voice, "This right hand gets a little cold and numb, sometimes; would you mind rubbing it for me?"

Jean knelt down, and tenderly took the other's hand between her own warm, young palms, softly rubbing it.

The invalid lay back in her chair, white and still.

"Am I doing it right—gently enough—do my hands feel warm?" asked Jean, looking up into the other's face. "It is such a pleasure to be able to do something for you, Lady Roughton."

"Hush!" Then, with an effort, she added, "You must not spoil me, Miss Bell, and I must not allow you to make a nurse of yourself," with a still greater effort withdrawing her hand.

"I hope you will allow me to be a nurse or any thing else I am capable of being," earnestly replied Jean. "And if I am remiss in any thing I ought to do, I hope you will tell me. I was trained to be a governess."

"Were you? I do not wish to appear curious or impertinent, Miss Bell, but I am sure that there can not be any thing in your past which you need mind being known, and I should be so pleased to know more about you—how it was you found yourself left friendless and alone in the world, if you do not object to tell me?"

"Oh no; not a bit! Indeed, I would rather you knew all about me."

"Sit here, child."

"I would rather be here, please," said Jean; seating herself on a stool at the other's feet, she added, musingly, "and I am beginning to have quite a story now. Would you mind my not telling you the surname of my aunt and cousins, unless it slips out, Lady Roughton? They might not now like its being known that I belong to them."

"Suppress whatever you please," returned the elder lady, with a smile.

"Well, there is only one thing which I need suppress about myself, and you would not care to hear that," said Jean, thinking of Nugent Orme. "Where shall I begin? My story had not much of a beginning until I was over sixteen. I am only a little over seventeen now. You would not think that, would you? I feel as though I had lived quite a long life since I left school. I shall soon be quite an experienced person."

"Not just yet, I think," returned her ladyship, looking down with a tender smile, her hand going tremblingly out to the girl's bent head, "although I perceive you are be-

ginning to give up girlish vanities. Do you always wear your hair dressed in this simple fashion?" her hand touching the great gold-brown twists and lingering there.

"Yes, I shall always wear it so now. I hope you do not mind, Lady Roughton?"

"Not at all; it is very much more becoming than the present fashion, although I suppose that is not your reason for wearing it so. Probably some one you cared for liked to see it so dressed?" bending down a little lower to get a better view of the girl's face, and noting the soft, rosy flush which covered it.

"Yes," said Jean, consciously.

"Then I think there must be something about love in your story; is not there?" curiously.

"That is the very part I did not mean to tell," said Jean. "But it would not be a good story, not a grown-up story, without some love in it—would it?"

"I suppose not," with a bitter sigh. "But I must not interrupt you again. Your story dates from about a year ago?"

"In one way it does. Do you know, I would endure what I have since over and over again rather than go back to the old school life. It was so terrible, Lady Roughton!"

"Why?"

"Because there was no love in it; nobody cared for me. I was not like other girls; every body seemed to think that there was something wrong about me, so they did not care to have me for a friend. I always believed, and so did the other pupils, that Miss Bowles took me out of charity, but I know now that papa did pay for me. So I grew up not nice; I was so stupid about things that every body else knew. I had never seen a home, and the girls used to laugh at me for my absurd fancies about what it was like. I never remember to have had a kiss from any body in my life until I left school and went to Aunt Maria's. I suppose that's the reason I've been so eager for love ever since." Could Jean have known that it was Lady Roughton's lips, instead of her hands, which were now touching her hair, how surprised she would have been! Unconsciously, she went on: "Then, although I tried to learn well, and Miss Bowles said I was pretty well advanced for my age, I did so many wrong things out of study hours. But it was often only to try how it felt, you know, and because nobody cared about my being good. I thought I was quite alone in the world. But one day it suddenly turned out that I had had a father living all the time. He had intended me to be trained for a governess, to earn my own living. I know now that something had happened which made him not care for me, and so wished me to believe that he was dead; but he suddenly altered his mind, and wrote to say I was to

live with my aunt and cousins until he returned to England, and have lots of money to spend. Ah, what a change it was! How delightful to leave Ivy Lodge at last! It was almost too much happiness for me to bear at first. The life at dear old Fernside was so delightful. I had never imagined there could be any thing like it out of a fairy tale. Aunt Maria was so kind, and so was Cousin Maud—as kind as she could be, considering—”

“Considering what?”

“The difference between us. She was so clever and beautiful, that of course she found me tiresome at first.”

“Oh, indeed.”

“Then there was Cousin Louis; he was so kind—”

“What sort of kindness was his?”

“Like a dear brother’s, you know; and I was so fond of him until he wanted me to be fonder, and— Now, where ought I to go on?” she said, pausing a moment or two. “There was to be a fête at the Grange. There never was, and never could be, any place like Ardsey Grange, Lady Roughton, not even in fairy books.”

“Then he dwelt there?”

“Yes,” with a smile and a blush and a tear.

“Every body looked forward to the Grange fête. But it did not turn out to be such a very happy day for me, for I gave pain to— Oh dear, how difficult it is to tell a story when you want to leave some of the things out! Well, he was Annie’s brother, and I was so sorry to make him unhappy, you see—”

“I understand why, child.”

Jean looked relieved. “So I was rather glad when at last evening came, though it was the first time I had heard a band play. Aunt Maria was tired, and wanted to go, so she sent me to look after Maud. She was in the woods with Nugent. Do you like the name, Lady Roughton?”

“Yes, child; go on.”

“My cousin had just had an accident when I reached them, having fallen down and dislocated her ankle. We had to carry her into the house, and she could not be moved for some weeks. His aunt—she lived with him to keep his house, and so forth, you know—asked me to remain at the Grange to be useful to Maud, and so I came to know him. He had always made fun of me before, about my school ways and not knowing things, and I thought he was disagreeable and unkind for laughing at me. But I began to carry books and notes and flowers from him to Maud and her answers back, and then we knew each other better. He gave me permission to go into the dear old library whenever I pleased, and take any of the books to read. Then we used to talk about things, and so I came to love him, and I knew he loved me; though he had not

told me so, I knew it. One day I had a letter from papa; he was coming back to live in England, and we were to be together. I had carried my letter into the Grange woods to read it quite by myself, and Nugent happened to find me there. But of course I did not mind him. I read little bits out to him, until I came upon a sentence about hoping that there was no love-making going on, and then it all came out. Oh, Lady Roughton, he had been the same as engaged to my cousin for years!”

“What was he?”

“Good,” calmly and decidedly; then, in a lower tone, “The parting was very hard to bear—”

“Parting?”

“Of course, we had to give each other up.”

“Why?”

“He had been the same as engaged to my cousin for years, you know.”

“And it would not have been a sin,” murmured Lady Roughton.

“It would have been a sin against Maud,” returned Jean, in some surprise.

“But—for love’s sake?” said Lady Roughton; it sounded almost pleadingly.

“One can not do wrong for love’s sake. Oh, Lady Roughton, you are not one of those who think so meanly of love as that! Would you have married Sir Arthur if another woman had been wronged by it? No, of course not.”

Lady Roughton’s eyes fell, and she shrunk back from contact with the girl, making her a sign to continue her story.

“It was very hard to bear, all the same, and it gets harder for me every day to think of him as Maud’s husband; but—”

“If it were a thousand times harder, you would do the same again?”

“Why, yes, of course! There would be nothing else to be done, you know.” Then, noticing the increased pallor of the other’s face, “I am afraid I tire you, Lady Roughton?”

“No; is your story finished?”

“Nearly. Poor Maud in some way found out about his loving me, and she did not like me so well afterward, though I did my best to make her understand that I had not tried to destroy her happiness.”

“Do you think it ever occurred to her that she was destroying yours?”

“It is not destroyed; I have not wronged her in my heart. It is harder for her than for me if she thinks I did. After my father’s death, she did not like me for another reason.”

“What became of his property? You said he was rich, did you not?”

“Yes, he was; but my aunt and cousins had more right to his money than I.”

“How could that be?”

“It came out that he had not married my mother.”

"They told you that And they taught you to despise your miserable mother!"

"No one could teach me what I do not choose to learn, Lady Roughton!" stiffly.

"Nevertheless, she would perceive— I tell you she could better endure the scorn of all the world than such condemnation as yours."

"Lady Roughton!"

"Mean as well as you would, every word of yours would be the bitterest reproach to her; your very love would reproach her. A thousand times better for both that she is dead. You said she is, did you not?"

"Yes, soon after I was born; but it is not better for me, Lady Roughton."

"You do not know the awful gulf there would be between you. You do not know—thank God, you never will—how completely you and she would be separated!"

"Nothing could separate my love from my mother—nothing! You are unkind, Lady Roughton!" hotly.

"Hush! I would not have you different for all the world!"

"I want to be what my mother would have me be."

"I think your miserable mother would thank God that you can not be as she was. Be thankful that you inherit no tendency—"

"I am not a bit thankful if I inherit any thing that other people don't inherit, Lady Roughton. Thankful! No, indeed; I should be quite ashamed of getting to the right side of your gulf *that way*!" Then, with a toss of the head and little defiant laugh, she went on, "Not that it is a bit likely that I am there. I am not so sure that I do not inherit a tendency or affinity, or whatever you please to call it, to evil. Miss Bowles was always punishing me for what she termed my inherent defects, and she ought to know, I suppose."

"You do not know—thank God, you never, never will!"

"Oh yes, I do!" exclaimed the girl, irritated beyond endurance by the other's tone. "I will give you a proof that I do not belong to your perfect people. A girl came one day to Mrs. Brice's shop, and I could not understand how it was that my heart went so tenderly out to her. She seemed miserable, but it was not only that, and it was not her being poor—no, I saw none but poor people then. It was some special appeal to my heart—to my love. There must have been some affinity between us, for I felt impelled to kiss her, and I made her let me. When she was gone, Mrs. Brice told me that respectable people avoided girls like her. So there was the attraction, you see!"

"The attraction was not her sin—you brought that home to her as it had never yet been brought home—it was your love, and her deep, pitiful need of such love. She may have been afraid of pure women before;

but your kiss gave her a belief—oh, Jean, a belief!"

"What have I done? Oh, Lady Roughton, what is it—have I made you ill? Pray forgive me."

For Lady Roughton was on the floor clinging about the young girl's feet; Jean did not perceive that she was kissing them. She knelt down, and took the drooping head on to her breast. "What ever shall I do! I ought to have borne with you, knowing you are ill. Shall I never learn to hide up my thoughts, unfortunate girl that I am!"

Lady Roughton looked up into the girl's eyes, but with an expression in her own very different from the anger Jean expected to see in them.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Roughton. I mean for saying it." It was not possible even now to apologize for having felt it.

"Hush, child; you do not know. Do you think I am angry—angry? I once knew—some one who had sinned—as that poor girl had, and—in her name bless God for what you have taught me. The Book tells me, and I hear it preached, but I have never dared to realize it until now. If the pure can feel such tender love and mercy here!" She broke down sobbing upon Jean's neck.

"Then you did not really mean to be unkind about my mother?" said Jean, not a little puzzled as well as astonished. "It was fancying that which made me in such a temper, you know."

"No one in the world could pity her more deeply than I—the very angels might pity her now!" Noting the young girl's look of astonishment, she added, confusedly, "I—I mean for—being separated from her child." Then lowering her voice, "Will you—kiss me, Jean—you said you kissed that poor girl?"

Jean was speechless with astonishment. She was still utterly blind to the truth, seeing no more than the bare words said. She bent down and tenderly kissed the drooping face, then softly laid her cheek against the other's and remained silent. A terribly bitter struggle was going on in Lady Roughton's mind, her whole soul yearning for the love which a word from her would call forth. But, whatever she had once been, self was not the first consideration with her now, and she presently put the temptation aside. For Jean's sake she would try to be content with such love as a stranger could win. At length she overcame, succeeded in recovering her self-control, more accustomed to exercise it than was her companion, and said, with a little attempt at a smile and a jest, "We must not let Floyd find me here, or she will think that I have been worse than I really have."

Jean tenderly assisted her to the low chair again, and knelt down beside her.

"I shall never forgive myself if I have

made you worse, dear Lady Roughton. I did not understand—”

“Child, you have done me good—how much good you can never know,” with a low sigh. Presently she went on nervously, terribly afraid of herself, yet feeling compelled to say so much: “And out of gratitude for your tender mercy toward—her I told you about—your tender pity for one reaches all—I must ever be your friend. Will you try to think of me and trust me as one?”

“Dear Lady Roughton, how thankful I am, how very, very thankful! I can hardly explain my feelings; but this I know, that I shall love you very dearly if you will let me?”

“Yes; I will let you, child. Who would object to be dearly loved, do you think?” returned the elder lady, trying to speak in a light tone.

“How happy I feel to be close to you like this!” presently murmured Jean, nestling her cheek down to the other’s hand! “It seems almost as if I had known you in some other life, and this was but a renewing.”

“Child, child!”

“To think of my fancying you could mean to speak reproachfully of my mother!”

“And,” thought Lady Roughton, “to think of my fancying that the pure could have no pity for her!”

“We shall understand each other better as time goes on, Jean.”

“And you quite forgive my showing off, don’t you?”

“Quite,” returned Lady Roughton, with a sad smile.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### FAST FRIENDS.

THE slight restraint which had first existed between them was gone forever, and Jean and Lady Roughton were fast friends. It was a friendship such as Jean had never before realized. Lady Roughton seemed to have no greater pleasure than studying how to gratify her young companion’s tastes, petting her in all sorts of ways; and Jean “blushed and bloomed” under it all in shy delight, more grateful than she could find words to express for the love and kindness lavished upon her. “How glad would he be to know she had found a haven such as this!” she thought.

It was very soon understood by the servants that they could not better please their mistress than by attending to Miss Bell’s comforts, and they vied with each other in anticipating her wants. They believed it to be only a sudden whim of their mistress’s, which was not likely to last long, but while it did they best served their own interests, by indulging it.

Jean could be just herself now with her

friend, and Lady Roughton took the deepest interest in studying the pure, fresh, young mind so frankly offered for her perusal. It did her good to watch Jean flitting delightedly about her new home, giving free expression to her girlish fancies—the romance and enthusiasm so healthily balanced by the natural vigor and freshness of her intelligence. Then, she took so much pride in the girl’s beauty (she was one of the few to whom it was beauty), and exercised her taste in ordering the most charming toilets for her, with so true a perception of what was becoming to Jean that the latter always appeared simply dressed. Only minds so appreciative upon such subjects as Floyd’s could have told how really expensive was the elegant simplicity. Jean herself would have been the last to guess the value of the things she wore. Lady Roughton was secretly amused at her ignorance, and not at all inclined to enlighten her. So Jean’s days passed delightfully on, every thing that could be thought of being done for her happiness. There were pleasant drives, Lady Roughton lying back among her cushions, listening with her sad smile to the girl’s enthusiasm; the walks in the square with Floyd; new books, music, flowers, and happy, quiet Sundays. They generally drove to some quiet suburban church, avoiding fashionable neighborhoods, and keeping out of notice as much as possible. Lady Roughton never talked religion; but Jean knew that many a time tears were raining down her cheeks under her thick veil as she knelt in prayer. But although there was apparently some irrevocable sorrow and regret in her own mind, she made Jean feel that she liked to see others happy, and encouraged instead of checking the young girl’s buoyancy of spirits.

“I think you must find some pet name for me, my love,” one morning said Lady Roughton, after a little thought.

“I call you all sorts of pet names in my heart,” laughed Jean, perching herself on the side of Lady Roughton’s chair, and putting one arm round her neck. “The last was Blessing—how do you like being my blessing?”

But the other had spoken with a purpose.

“I think I want something more individual—an especial pet name for when we are quite alone, you know.” Then, with the color faintly tingeing her cheeks, and a little laugh, it might be to hide some deeper emotion, she went on: “How if you were sometimes to call me—Mother?”

Jean sat gravely silent a few moments; then, in a low voice, replied, “It is so kind of you to wish it; but, dear, I could not. It belongs to her in my thoughts and prayers.”

To Jean’s great relief, Lady Roughton smiled content. “Well, well, I ought not

to object to that. Call me what you will, my child."

So Jean found all sorts of pet names for her, and she seemed never tired of listening to the girl's nonsense talk.

"I shall begin to think that you do care for me a little, if you run on at that rate, you foolish child," she would say again and again, just to call forth Jean's laughing protest.

"But I don't care for you a little, dear. The idea of accusing me of such a thing! Care for you a little, indeed! Do you take me for a jelly-fish, madam? Let me beg you to understand that I am not the kind of person to do things a little."

"Well, perhaps, I ought to have known that!" smiled her ladyship.

"To be sure you ought, and you must be well punished for not knowing it."

The other bore her punishment of being "well kissed up," as Jean termed it, in the meekest way. In truth, it was more like the frank, tender intercourse between mother and child than any thing else, and Lady Roughton began to revive wonderfully under the new aspect of things. It was the opinion of one or two in the household that her reviving so much under this new influence, when all her husband's generous efforts had had no effect, was not very complimentary to him. But he did not appear to look upon it in that light. On his side he was extremely cordial to Jean. As she lost her first shyness, and expanded a little to him, he was highly amused at the freshness of her talk and the transparent singleness of her mind—its directness, and keen discrimination between right and wrong. As time went on, he found himself more and more frequently appealing to her upon all sorts of questions, and was secretly amused at the impossibility of mystifying her. When appealed to, she would gravely and carefully divest an idea of its swaddling-clothes, and judge it by its right or wrong, in a simple, unconscious fashion of her own, which was particularly fascinating to a man of his calibre—given to put a little too much value upon words. The directness and simplicity with which she would acknowledge, "Well, I don't understand that a bit!" when he offered a problem for her solution. "Would you mind telling me once more?" Then, with a grave shake of the head, "It sounds right, and yet I feel that there is something wrong about it." It was in reference to one of his speeches upon the labor question, which he had just read to her, and of which he was a little proud.

"Where is the flaw?" he asked.

"That is what I can't find out—not yet," she returned, wrinkling up her brows. "Would you mind reading it just once more, Sir Arthur? I will fancy myself a laboring-man, and see what he thinks about

it." She sat gravely listening, with closed eyes; and what the laboring-man thought not a little startled Sir Arthur Roughton.

"Did you really tell him that, child?" would laugh Lady Roughton, highly amused.

"Sir Arthur said I was to tell him exactly what I thought; so of course I did, and he was not a bit angry about it."

No—Lady Roughton found that her husband appeared to appreciate Jean quite as much as she desired he should. Fastidious as he was, he had not a word to say against Jean. His wife found him as ready to make plans for the girl's comfort and amusement as she was herself.

One morning, while waiting for Sir Arthur to join her at the breakfast-table, Jean took up the *Times*, and was idly glancing at the first column, when her eyes suddenly lighted upon the announcement:

"On the 15th, at Raystone, by the Rev. Dr. Brayleigh, Nugent, only son of the late Allan Orme, Esq., of Ardsey Grange, to Maud, only daughter of the late Dr. Poynder," etc., etc.

"What is the matter? Are you not well, Miss Bell?" said Sir Arthur, who presently afterward entered the room.

She was standing on the hearth-rug, white and still as a marble statue, holding the paper crushed in her hands. He guessed that she had come upon bad news of some kind, and added gently, for she answered him never a word, staring blankly before her, "I am afraid you have found some bad news in that paper?"

"Yes."

Then she mechanically sat down, and began to pour out his coffee.

He delicately abstained from looking toward her, occupying himself with his letters.

"May I give you any more, Sir Arthur?"

"No, thank you."

"Will you excuse me?"

Then he saw that she had merely attended to his wants, taking nothing herself. Opening the door for her, he said,

"I am sorry to have detained you, Miss Bell. I hoped we had succeeded in making you feel at home here."

"You have," she murmured.

"No, you were not friendly enough to quit the room until the usual time, because I was such a dolt as not to perceive I was detaining you."

"You are always kind to me, Sir Arthur," she replied, looking up into his face without attempting to conceal her tears.

"That is the right and proper thing to say, I suppose; but you have taught me to expect both something more and something less than what is conventionally proper from you." He might have said that she had taught him a new creed altogether about her sex.

"What ought I to say?" she returned,

afraid of seeming ungracious, or, worse, ungrateful. "I am sure I want to say what is right. No," with a little deprecatory look, "I want to say something more than what is only right. I never had such friends as dear Lady Roughton and you. I am often quite afraid to open my eyes when I wake in the morning, lest I should find my being here has been only a pleasant dream. And I like you, not only because you are good to me, but because you are good; do believe it."

He bowed, and let her pass out without further protest. After all, she had been friendly enough to carry off his paper, and that not his most intimate friend could have done with impunity a few months previously. In truth, Sir Arthur Roughton was not the same man he had been before Jean's advent. He had been gradually lapsing into the self-indulgent habits of a man without any demand upon his affections, and with ample means to gratify his tastes. His wife was perfectly satisfied with his daily half-hour's visit. He had got accustomed to acquiesce in their separate life; and would now probably have found it impossible to keep up any semblance of feeling more than kindly toward her.

In a moment, Lady Roughton saw the shadow in Jean's face, and anxiously questioned, glancing at the paper which the girl still held in her hand, "Dear child, the death of some one you love?"

"Yes, the same—he is married—it is a sin now."

Lady Roughton understood, and asked no more. But all that delicate, tender love could do in the way of softening the blow was done. Jean was not a little ashamed of the misery she endured. Although she had been so long trying to prepare herself for it, the news had given her a terrible shock when it came. She despised herself for suffering; but she suffered none the less. Then, the attempts of her kind friends to cheer and pet her seemed only to irritate her. She was half conscious that hers was a nature better able to bear trouble without petting; in truth, that a course of hard work would have been less enervating than the luxurious life she was leading. She was no exotic, and it did not improve her to be treated as one.

As Lady Roughton watched her growing thinner and paler, she forgot her own weakness, and exerted herself more and more in her anxiety for Jean; and her husband was gravely concerned. He supposed that Jean had seen the death of some friend in the paper, and his wife had her reasons for not un-deceiving him. She had given Jean a hint that it would be as well to avoid telling Sir Arthur any thing about her past history, or mentioning the names of her relatives to him, and the girl had very willingly obeyed

her. Sir Arthur believed Jean's to be the every-day story of a poor relation neglected by rich ones. His wife encouraged him to do every thing that lay in his power to cheer Jean. Her face always lighted up with a smile when he sent home some little offering for Jean in his wife's name, and she even gave him an occasional hint as to the kind of presents which would be most acceptable to a young girl. Jean was beginning to feel quite ashamed of possessing such a collection of valuable things. One gift she always wore, and valued far above the rest—a locket containing a fine portrait of Lady Roughton, attached to a slender gold necklet. Sir Arthur and his wife had together chosen the beautiful locket for her; but Jean had not the slightest idea of the real value of the stones forming the monogram M.R. on the back of it, or how near she was to the literal truth in calling it her most valuable treasure.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### AT THE THEATRE.

THE servants were looking on with wonder, gossiping a great deal over their master's and mistress's infatuation for Miss Bell. If she had been their own child she could not have been more pampered and indulged; while all the servants in the house knew that their situations depended upon their behavior toward Miss Bell. Had not James been dismissed by his master at once, with a quarter's wages, for some inattention to her at the table? True, she did not seem to care about it at all, and was pleasant and unpretending enough with them; but they were getting more and more inclined to believe that that was only her art. Besides, what did she go about looking so dismal for, when all in the house were at their wits' end trying to do things to please her? Companion, indeed! when the whole house was put into commotion if she looked a trifle paler than usual. She might thank her lucky stars that she was not with some ladies; though it might do her good to be taken down a little. Then, as time went on, whispers began to circulate about there being another cause for her becoming so set up above other people; ominous shakes of the head; wonder how a certain person could be so blind as not to see what was going on under her very nose, etc., etc.

"It's to be the theatre now," one morning said the butler, as he entered the housekeeper's room after his attendance at the breakfast-table.

"She fancies that she might possibly be amused, and, of course, he must go himself to secure the best box at the Haymarket for her."

Sir Arthur had made some allusion to a piece criticised in one of the morning papers, and Jean had remarked that she did not know what a theatre was like. As the butler said, that was quite enough for Sir Arthur. A box must be got at once.

"And her ladyship is every bit as bad!" said Floyd. "She was quite delighted when my young lady condescended to say that she would go. And you are to accompany her, Mrs. Lane; Lady Roughton can not, of course, venture, and so she is going to trust her to you for this once."

The housekeeper tossed her head, and opined that the sooner her ladyship's eyes were opened about the girl the better. But she was not quite so averse to spending an evening in a comfortable box at the theatre as she would have had the others believe.

Lady Roughton was highly amused at Jean's speculations as to what a theatre would be like.

"Shall I have to be dressed up as if for a party, dear?"

"No, full dress would not be in good taste, my love; particularly as you will be accompanied only by Mrs. Lane. Your high white muslin dress will be quite sufficient."

And in her simple muslin dress, and an Indian embroidered burnoose of Lady Roughton's, with a delicate flush in her cheeks, and her eyes brilliant with excitement, Jean did look charming enough to warrant Floyd's expression of admiration; for, notwithstanding her prejudice against the young girl, she was too true an artiste of her class not to admire her from a professional point of view.

"How I should enjoy dressing you for a ball, Miss Bell!" she exclaimed, winning a smile from her mistress for the speech. "But does not your ladyship think there should be just one bit of color—a rose or bow in the hair?"

"No, Floyd; there is color enough, I think, and the shape of Miss Bell's head is better seen, dressed in her own simple fashion." For she had the good taste to perceive that no color could be finer than the soft rose of the cheeks, and no ornament more becoming than the natural crown to the dainty head. She gazed at the sweet, girlish face with tender, yearning eyes, then shaded them with her hand, as she sunk back in her chair with a low sigh.

"You are not so well to-night!" ejaculated Jean, forgetting her muslin, and kneeling down by the other's side. "Do not let me leave you—indeed, indeed, I should not enjoy myself a bit. Dear, you *know* I should not if—"

"Foolish child! I am quite as usual, and shall be decidedly the better for knowing you are enjoying yourself."

"Really—really?"

"Yes, really, really," with an assuring smile.

"The carriage is at the door, Miss Bell; and this is the bouquet from Sir Arthur," said Floyd, with a meaning look toward her mistress. Surely, Lady Roughton would not put up with that!

"Let me look, my darling," said her ladyship. "Ah, I am glad he thought of a holder; and this is a really pretty one, is it not?"

"Well!" mentally ejaculated Floyd.

"And are not the flowers lovely?" said Jean. "My favorites, too; as though Sir Arthur remembered my saying I liked them. How *very* kind of him, was it not, dear?" turning them about for Lady Roughton to admire.

"The carriage is waiting, Miss Bell," repeated Floyd, hardly able to contain herself, and looking as severe as she dared.

Jean put her arm round Lady Roughton's neck, kissing her as a child kisses its mother.

Then, attended by Floyd, she descended to the hall, where she found Mrs. Lane, the housekeeper, in her state silk dress and prettiest cap, waiting to accompany her. Sir Arthur came out of the library to lead her to the carriage.

"You will be careful to keep quite close to Miss Bell in passing to and returning from the box, Mrs. Lane. There may be some little crush in coming out."

"Very well, Sir Arthur," stiffly replied Mrs. Lane.

"How *very* kind he is!" thought Jean, as she took her seat in the comfortable carriage, and they were whirled away. Presently she added, aloud,

"Have you ever been to a theatre before, Mrs. Lane?"

"Many and many a time, Miss Bell."

"Then you will tell me what to do, will you not?"

"There's nothing to do but sit still and look on," returned Mrs. Lane.

"I can not imagine it a bit."

"Here we are, Miss Bell; and Sir Arthur said you were to keep close to me, you know."

Jean alighted from the carriage, and walked by the side of Mrs. Lane, with flushed cheeks and dilated eyes. They were shown to their box, and took their seats—Jean in front, and the housekeeper a little behind.

"But there is a chair here; will not you see better from the front, Mrs. Lane?"

She was so unmistakably in earnest, that Mrs. Lane, who had made up her mind to be very distant and dignified, softened a little toward her as she took the chair Jean indicated. The curtain rose as soon as they were seated, and Jean sat listening and gazing in a whirl of excitement, quite unconscious that others were not equally absorbed in the performance, and that she was beginning to attract some attention by her manifest forgetfulness of every thing but the stage. She sat with her elbow on the cush-

ion, and her chin in the palm of her hand, following every word; so deeply interested in the heroine's fortunes that, when she became involved in misery, Jean took out her pocket-handkerchief and wiped away her falling tears.

"It is really quite shameful to treat her so! I wonder she bears it so well," ejaculated indignant Jean. "They ought to *know* she could not do such a thing."

Mrs. Lane vouchsafed no reply.

"Look, mamma, at the charming *ingénue* in the opposite box!" smiled a fashionably attired girl, of about Jean's own age, who had long given up the illusions of youth.

"By Jove, it's real!" said a loungeur in the stalls, after a few moments' study of Jean through his glass. "Look at that girl in white, Cleveland; she's positively rubbing her eyes!"

"Where was she raised?" languidly said his companion, after examining her in turn; "and who is the old woman?"

Mrs. Lane, who was not given to sentiment, sat gazing stolidly through her spectacles, with her hands folded at her capacious waist. It was all very well for play-acting, but she was not going to waste her sympathies upon a heroine who raved about her poverty, in a white satin dress, and, in her deepest misery, found time to shoot killing glances into the stage-box. The contrast between Jean and her companion was, in truth, marked enough to attract attention and comment. But when, in the interval between the acts, the girl looked round the house, and became conscious of the sea of faces which surrounded her, she shrunk back, glad to avail herself of the friendly shade of the curtain. "What a host of people!" she murmured; and for the rest of the evening she laughed and cried out of sight.

As the evening wore on, Mrs. Lane took note of one especial pair of eyes in an opposite corner of the house, and she pursed up her lips with an air of severe disapproval, as she found that, whether the performance was going on or not, those eyes never turned from the spot where Jean sat. She glanced frequently and suspiciously at Jean, but the girl was unmistakably absorbed in what was going on on the stage, and continued sitting as much out of sight as possible.

"Do you wish to wait for the last piece, Miss Bell?" she asked, crossly.

"Why, yes, of course!" returned Jean, quite surprised at being asked such a question. "Who would think of leaving till it was all over?"

"I only thought you might like to return a little earlier on account of Lady Roughton, Miss Bell."

"Oh, thank you for telling me, Mrs. Lane. I had forgotten all about the time, and it must be getting late," said Jean, rising at once.

There were several loungeurs about the lobbies and stairs, who gazed admiringly and curiously at the girl shyly pressing on by the old woman's side, and not a few speculations were made as to who and what she was.

As soon as they were seated in the carriage, and on their way home, Jean's tongue was unloosed, and she expressed her wonder and delight at what they had seen, in her own fashion.

"Did not you feel just the same when you first saw a play, Mrs. Lane? Did not it seem like a fairy tale?"

"I never knew any thing about fairy tales, Miss Bell."

And afterward Mrs. Lane sat taciturn and severe, not to be won over by any amount of talk. She had seen what she had seen, and that was enough for her, as she afterward informed her confidante, Mrs. Floyd.

"There he was, sitting with his eyes fixed upon her the whole evening, and there he was, getting out of a cab just as we drove up to the door; and don't tell me that she was so blind as she made believe to be."

"But the wonder of it is that her ladyship can't see!" said Floyd. "It's just as though she were bewitched. She can't bear Miss Bell to be out of her sight, except it is to be enjoying herself. You can always put her into a good humor by saying a word in praise of Miss Bell."

"Such a supper as was ordered to tempt her appetite when she got back, too!" added Mrs. Lane. "Every delicacy that could be thought of!"

A day or two after her visit to the theatre, Jean began to droop again, and all sorts of fresh amusements were talked of by Lady Roughton and her husband. Where would she like to go? Concerts, theatres, exhibitions—they read out the advertisements to her in the hope of getting her to express a wish; but she only shook her head.

"I think if I were to get up early to do some kind of work," she one day replied to Lady Roughton's anxious questionings and hints about getting medical advice. "I wish you did not mind my going out by myself."

"Out by yourself! Why, child?"

"Because I think it would do me good to go and help Mrs. Brice for an hour or two in the morning."

"How do you mean 'help' her, my love?"

"Oh, cleaning work; mending, comforting up, any thing wanted to be done, you know."

"If you really wish it, my child," hesitated Lady Roughton, tenderly smoothing back the hair from the girl's broad brow. "But I am a little jealous of Mrs. Brice being able to do more for you than I can."

"As if any body could do as much for me as you can!"



"Well, then, I will say I am disappointed that the life here does not suit you."

"Dear, kind Lady Roughton; it would suit me if I were stronger—more good, you know," said Jean, drawing the other's hand to her lips.

"Sir Arthur thinks that change of scene and air might do you good. Would you like to go to the sea, dear child, if we take a house in some pretty, cheerful place?"

"For me! Oh no, no, indeed, you must not! How selfish I must be getting, to draw so much attention to myself!"

"Do not fear that, child. Would you like to go, Jean?"

"Would you like it, dear?"

"Yes, I think the change might do me some good. I am sure it would if I saw you improving."

Jean could not but acknowledge she would like to see the sea, and that was enough. Sir Arthur saw an agent, and engaged a house for the season at Broadstairs, that place being recommended by Lady Roughton's physicians. "I must get strong and happy now," thought Jean. "It would be the basest ingratitude not to." And, to prove to her kind friends that she was feeling as she was in duty bound to feel, she forced herself to laugh and talk and look gay, and fancied she deceived them. The sea was a new knowledge to her, and for the first few days it had an exhilarating effect upon her spirits. But she soon got to care for nothing else but to sit gazing at it, and then they found that that was not the kind of tonic she required, although she declared she was quite well.

The medical man whom, at length, Lady Roughton anxiously consulted, was a general practitioner with too much business to care about fostering the idiosyncrasies of chance visitors to the place. He saw the mistake they were making, and plainly told them so. Instead of petting and watching her as they were doing, they were to employ every hour of her time, and see that she went healthily tired to bed every night. In fine, the best thing he could recommend for such a temperament was healthy exercise for mind and body, and plenty of it. Delicate? pooh, nonsense! only a healthy organization rebelling against unhealthy treatment.

Lady Roughton held counsel with her husband, and they agreed that Dr. Wilford's plan should be tried.

"He says she ought to take long walks, and that scrambling about over the rocks would do her an immense deal of good. I must give her an object—to get me specimens of sea-weed, or what not, and perhaps you would not mind accompanying her sometimes, Arthur, when you are here?"

"Oh no."

"And what do you think of trying a little yachting with her? You used to like

yachting so much, and I fancy she would be a good sailor."

He readily consented, and his wife amused herself in choosing the prettiest yachting costumes to be had.

"Does not she make the bonniest sailor, Floyd?" exclaimed Lady Roughton, appealing for the maid's admiration.

"It's a very becoming dress, my lady," reluctantly assented Floyd, who was quite aware that the pretty, dark-blue serge dress and open collar, and the simple sailor's hat, with its crimson ribbon, were especially becoming to the girl's delicate, refined face and figure. Just the kind of dress which gives a little piquant touch to one kind of girl, and makes a less refined one look too demonstrative. Floyd saw all that; but, as she afterward told her friend, Mrs. Lane, she was not going to fall down and worship a girl because her dress became her. If Lady Roughton chose to be blinded, Floyd did not. "Brettiness does not make up for the want of other things in my eyes, Mrs. Lane!"

In truth, the servants were beginning to think that Jean must be more than ordinarily designing; for, watch her as they might, they could never find her out. Lady Roughton could not get any one to express admiration enough for Jean to satisfy her. Even her husband was beginning to say less and less about the girl.

A trial trip was taken across the bay; Lady Roughton watching the little yacht through a glass from her window. Then, the agreed-upon signal that Jean's nautical behavior was good—a small Union-jack—was run up, amidst merry laughter on board, and the yacht was swiftly bowling away before the wind.

"Ah, this is delightful—like doing something!" exclaimed Jean, her cheeks flushed, and eyes brilliant with excitement, as she stood clinging to a rope, her hair blown about by the wind. "I was afraid that I should have to stay in that little place, where I could only peep out of that tiny window, because I am a girl!"

Sir Arthur laughed out as he had not laughed for many a long year. In truth, he was younger for his age than he had imagined himself to be—younger than many a less quiet, living man of thirty. Before Jean's advent, he had fancied himself quite settled down into grave, quiet, middle life, with a developing taste for politics. But here was he enjoying the sail as keenly as the veriest school-boy; challenging Jean to all sorts of nonsense talk.

She was quick to observe the change. "How much nicer he is when you get to know him!" she thought. "The idea of my ever having thought him stiff! He lets me say any thing to him now."

But Jean's "any thing," when she just let her thoughts flow into words as they came!

It was as great a revelation to Sir Arthur as it had been to Nugent Orme. If he was less stiff, as she termed it, he was almost reverential in his tone toward her, paying her more respect than he had ever before paid to woman. Though he had always been courteous enough in his bearing toward women, it had been only the conventional courtesy of good-breeding before he knew Jean.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### IN FACE OF DEATH.

"THE sail appears really to have done you good, dear child!" fondly said Lady Roughton, who had been waiting on the pier for the return of the yacht.

"Oh yes! it was delightful, and Sir Arthur was so kind, telling me all about the things. He thinks that if he had a good yacht you might enjoy coasting about, this glorious weather. Dear, do you think you would? It would make it quite perfect if you were with us."

"Well, perhaps; we shall see by-and-by, when the days are at their longest, child."

"Fancy being out there at night. It was lovely enough looking from the end of the pier last night, when the outlines grew softened, and the houses began to look like fairy temples and palaces in the air. What it must seem from farther out at sea! To lie gently rocking out there, dropping one's troublesome thoughts into the waves, out of sight. Not that we quite trust each other yet, you know!" playfully tossing a bit of sea-weed at an incoming wave. "I gave you a thought to keep the other night, and instead of hiding it up as you promised, you came and threw it at my feet in open daylight before the people—after promising to care for me and getting all my secrets out of me—whispering such things to me in the moonlight—you know you did!"

"Romantic child!" laughed Lady Roughton. "Run and change your dress—nay, do not hesitate; here is Sir Arthur coming, and he will bring me home." Following Jean with her eyes, as she ran lightly up the steps, she added to her husband, "Is she not charming in that dress, Arthur? How very different from the conventional girls one sees!"

"Yes. Are you better to-day, Mary—beginning to feel any benefit from being here? Will this air suit you, do you think?"

"I think I am a trifle better; as much better as I shall ever be. And you know I always liked the sea." After a short silence, she went on, apparently on the spur of the moment, in reality after long and anxious deliberation, "I am so glad you appreciate Jean, Arthur. Her coming was like a ray of sunlight let into my life. But I often feel

a little anxious about her future. My health is so precarious, and if I am suddenly taken away, she will be so utterly alone, so friendless and ignorant of the world—thank God she will ever be that! Arthur, you are very rich; my little income would be as nothing to you now—and—and she would be utterly penniless; when—nay, the time must come—when I am gone, may I hope that you will not let her feel—alone in the world?"

"She shall not," in a low voice, replied Sir Arthur.

"How good you are to me! My mind will now be at rest, for I know the value of your word." Then, laying her hand upon his, she went on impressively, "And I want you, by-and-by, to remember that the thought of her finding a protector in you was very comforting to me."

He reddened to the roots of his hair as he lifted his wife's hand to his lips, quite incapable of uttering a word. He thought he understood her, and she thought she understood him; yet each would have been quite aghast at the revelation, could they have read what was passing in the other's mind.

"I have now only to write a letter to him, to be read after my death," thought his wife. "His best plan would be to find her a home with some cheerful family, which my two hundred a year will very well pay for. In time, perhaps, she may meet some one able to efface the remembrance of that man" (Lady Roughton was somewhat of Martha's opinion respecting Nugent Orme); "at any rate, my darling will not have to undergo poverty again!"

"Poor Mary!" was her husband's reflection. "What an unselfish thought! very few women would be capable of saying that much to a husband."

Then, as they slowly returned to the house, said Lady Roughton: "It is fortunate your being able to be down here so much just now—to go about with her. Is not there a concert or something at the rooms to-night? Will you take her?"

Finding that he did not object, she was constantly planning little excursions for Jean and him.

"However she can do it, sending them out alone together, at all times and seasons as she does, beats me," thought Floyd. "And it's not a bit of use trying to put her on her guard. When I said, yesterday, that Miss Bell and Sir Arthur were very fond of going out together, she actually looked quite pleased. It don't seem natural. I think I see myself sending a husband off with a pretty girl, day after day, as she does! John Brill needn't expect that, I can tell him!"

"Take a wrap down to the pier, Floyd. You will find Sir Arthur and Miss Bell somewhere there, and I am afraid she may not be warm enough in that thin jacket, poor darling!"

"Poor darling, indeed!" mentally ejaculated Floyd, obeying under protest, and, as she herself termed it, "flouncing" down with a shawl to the end of the pier, where Sir Arthur and Jean were lingering in the moonlight.

"Oh, thank you, Floyd. I am not cold; but it was kind of you to think of it," said Jean.

"It was Lady Roughton's kindness," somewhat roughly returned Floyd, as she turned away, indignant at perceiving Sir Arthur's sudden anxiety lest Jean should take cold, carefully folding the wrap round her in spite of her laughing protests. Floyd's indignation was not allayed by hearing one young lady remark to another, with a glance at Sir Arthur and Jean, "Lovers."

That night when Floyd saw Jean alone, she said, eying the girl sharply as she spoke, "What do you think I heard some young ladies say about you and Sir Arthur, on the pier to-night, Miss Bell?"

"About me and Sir Arthur! What could they have to say?" asked Jean.

"They said you were lovers."

"Lovers! How ridiculous! Weren't you amused, Floyd?"

"No, Miss Bell, I was not," looking at the young girl's laughing face with indignant eyes. Should she go on? But Floyd did not wish to lose her situation, which might perhaps happen if she ventured to say any more, so she remained silent, though it was difficult enough to do so. For Miss Bell to be so hardened as to laugh at it! Poor Lady Roughton!

"What do you think Floyd told me last night?" laughingly said Jean, the next morning, to Sir Arthur, poisoning herself upon the slippery rocks, with her skirts gathered about her, as the remembrance suddenly flashed upon her. They had rambled out along the sands and on to the rocks in search of treasures for Lady Roughton—the latter's excuse for sending Jean out—and neither perceived that they were getting too far from the small bay which would first be covered by the tide which had been for some time running in.

"Floyd?"

"Yes; only fancy, she told me that she heard some people on the pier last night call us lovers—you and me! Will not dear Lady Roughton be amused?" Then, forgetting the words as soon as they were uttered—they meant nothing to her—and hooking the end of her sunshade into some new treasure of sea-weed, she lightly went on: "Ah, I really must have you, dear! You are much too pretty to lie there. Foolish little thing to cling so tight. Wouldn't you like to see another world before you die? Well, I know—lie still, then," passing on her way, slipping every moment into the little pools, and lightly springing on again.

Sir Arthur lagged behind, apparently absorbed in some discovery of his own. In reality, trying to recover his self-possession, which had been terribly disturbed. "I must be more careful," he thought. "God forbid that any shadow of blame should fall upon her. I have, perhaps, attracted remark by being so constantly with her." He was thankful to perceive that the idea was only a momentary jest to her. None could know better than he how completely free she was from any under-current of sentiment toward him. She was more frank than any girl he had ever known, and it was impossible to misunderstand her. It would have been difficult to pay the most ordinary compliment to Jean, had he wished to pay it. There had never been the slightest approach to any thing which the world might not hear between them (in her wildest flights of fancy, Jean, as if intuitively, swerved from all that was false in sentiment), and yet he was painfully conscious that if critical eyes had been watching them, they might have seen that he was not so undeserving the name that had been given them as was she.

"What have you got there, Jean?" he presently asked, trying to speak in his usual tone.

"Oh, nothing, as usual! They look so lovely in the water; but when I fish them out, all the beautiful color is gone."

"That certainly does not look like a fine emerald."

"Oh no; I'm not going to carry home a piece of a green-glass bottle again. Did not my dear laugh—? Oh, Sir Arthur!"

"What—what is it, Jean? Did you slip—have you hurt yourself?" springing toward her, and seeing nothing but her white face and wildly dilated eyes.

"Look!" she whispered.

The water was more than a foot high at the point of the rock jutting out nearest them, and the small bay they would have to cross, lying farther out than the one they were in, must be already covered. He took in the situation at a glance. They were caught by the tide in that small bay, surrounded by steep perpendicular rocks, which there was not the least possibility of climbing.

"Can you run fast?"

"Yes." They ran side by side, he now and again offering his hand to help her as she slipped upon the wet rocks. But she sprang lightly on again, and got as far as she could go with him. There was just the chance, he fancied, that they might round the point and be seen from the pier, or perhaps find footing enough to climb a little way up where the rock was more jagged. The waves were leaping some feet over the point, and covered the small bay beyond. They were caught and imprisoned in their dreadful trap; it was only a question of

half an hour at most. They silently turned, walking mechanically back toward the centre of the bay, where they could remain longest.

Jean was the first to break the silence. Holding out her sunshade, she asked him to tie his handkerchief round it and stick it into the highest crevice he could reach in the rock. Without the slightest hope—he knew that pleasure-boats rarely came that way, and that larger vessels would not be sufficiently inshore to notice them—he thrust the signal into a crevice as high above them as he could reach.

Then they were silent again, until, venturing to look into the still white face by his side, the words burst forth,

"Thank God, you are brave!"

"I do not know that it is bravery," with a shudder. "Twill be very hard to bear—aright!"

"Hard!" looking around with wild eyes. "To be beaten to death—crushed out of all identity against those frightful rocks!"

She glanced at the pitiless rocks, and then at the advancing waves dancing gayly in the sunshine.

"It would be no worse losing our identity here than anywhere else, if we *had* to lose it. But you do not believe that?"

"You are speaking of the soul, about which they who think they know most know nothing," he replied, moodily.

"I know that part of me will not be crushed to death against those rocks."

"How do you know?"

"Because it can scale them."

Sir Arthur Roughton was a brave man. He had been a soldier, and had once, when but a few years older than Jean, faced death with his men. But to die thus—like a rat in a hole—to stand helplessly there until the merciless waves beat out his life and hers against those rocks! He looked again into the still white face by his side, and now its very stillness irritated him. In the first moment, he had been thankful to find her so quiet and self-possessed; now he chafed at it. Did she not yet realize the awfulness of the coming struggle, or was it religion? *What* was it? He gloomily watched the water creep round a piece of rock, a few yards in front of them, then exclaimed,

"Can not you cry, or—complain, or do something other women would do?" It would have been some little relief to be able to *cheer* and sustain her, so long as it remained in his power.

"I am crying," she murmured, unconscious that her eyes were tearless. "But it is no use complaining because we forgot about the tide."

"Well, I suppose I ought to be thankful that your feelings are not quite so acute as I imagined them to be," bitterly.

"I am trying to pray; will you help me?"

He broke down. "Oh, Jean, Jean, if prayers of mine could help you! *I can not* stand here to see it." Once more he strained his eyes over the heaving waters. No, there was no hope now. If a boat were in sight, it could not reach them in time. "*I must* speak! Jean, try to listen; try to imagine a man married to a woman for whom love is dead, and—and imagine the woman he did love in face of death. Would she—"

"Do not go on." She thought he knew her story, and was too much stirred by the remembrance of the past to notice his agitation. "*I have* imagined it, and I have said good-bye to him."

"How! Oh, Jean, how!" he eagerly ejaculated, fastening his eyes hungrily upon her face. "Did you give him one word of love—there could be nothing in it now—one word to help him?"

"I have been praying that his wife's love may help him," she replied, absently.

"You do not know what love is!" he wildly exclaimed. "Ah, God forgive me, I meant self-love!"

She shuddered, and drew a little nearer to him, placing her hands in his. He found that the water was touching his feet, and his hands closed over hers with a tighter grip. Death should not divide them. But it was not the first chill contact with the water which had caused her involuntary movement. The demon of doubt was trying to get possession of her soul. Dim with troubled thought, her eyes wandered fearfully over the advancing waves, and she murmured something which he interpreted to mean terror—a sudden awakening to the awfulness of the approaching death. In his misery, he almost welcomed this first symptom of weakness. It seemed to bring him nearer to her. But the few words of comfort he faltered out were received with a faint smile.

"I am not afraid of the pain—not that part of dying."

He watched her silently as she wrestled and overcame. The mists of doubt gradually cleared from her mind, and a new light, steadfast and clear, arose in the brown eyes.

Sir Arthur Roughton stared blankly at her. In the sudden recognition of what it was that would divide them, he hoarsely ejaculated, "Separated to all eternity!"

"No, no, no!" Unconscious that any one's life was materially worse than her own, she laid her hand upon his arm, and continued, "Neither height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of—"

"Us! Ah! Shut your eyes!"

She closed them, and folded her hands in prayer, believing that the moment had come, and he meant to spare her the sight of a wave advancing to engulf her. But his

eyes were turned toward the jutting point. A boat was in sight laboring round on its way toward them, and, measuring the distance with his eye, he was afraid to tantalize her with hope. But, after a moment or two, he ventured to say, "Look up now, Jean."

Her eyes followed the direction of his, and then he was the stronger of the two. It needed not only his cheering words, but all his physical strength, to sustain her and prevent her being washed from his hold, as wave after wave arose. Once she was dragged from him, but he fought desperately for her, and had her in his arms again. The crew advancing to the rescue saw that not a moment must be lost, and worked with a will, sending the boat bounding over the waves at every stroke of the oars. As soon as they got within a barely safe distance, two of the crew swam and waded to the exhausted man's assistance. They scarcely knew whether Jean was still living as they lifted her into the boat; but they contrived to make her swallow a few drops of brandy, and then bent to their work again. There was no time to be lost, with that death-like face in the boat. Exhausted as he was, Sir Arthur held her in his arms, urging the willing men on with promises of large reward. The rumor that some one had been caught by the tide (they had been seen from the cliffs, and a boat dispatched to their aid as quickly as possible) had rapidly spread, and groups of people were gathered on the pier and about the sands to watch them brought in. Sir Arthur was a great deal too anxious upon Jean's account to notice the curious gazers, or, if he had done so, to pay the slightest heed to appearances. He would allow none to relieve him of his precious burden, carrying Jean in his arms the short distance to the house, excitement and the brandy they had given him lending him the temporary strength. They were met halfway to the house by Lady Roughton, and none present could help noticing that her anxiety, after the first word or two to her husband, seemed all for Jean. The latter was carried to her room, and very soon restored under the care of the medical man in attendance. In truth, she was suffering more from the mental shock she had received than any thing else.

"How can I ever be grateful enough?" she murmured, kissing the hand of Lady Roughton, down whose cheeks were streaming tears of joy. "Dear, what makes you care for me so much?"

"Care for you! Thank God, you are given back to my prayers! Jean, oh my child! my child!"

"Your ladyship will certainly have one of your bad attacks if you stand so long, and—and excite yourself in this way!" said Floyd, with an angry toss of her head.

"Oh no, Floyd. Joy can do me no harm

—not such joy as this. Besides, I have been so much better lately, you know."

The following morning Jean pleaded not being equal to her usual walking, and remained with Lady Roughton. They walked the few yards across from the house to one of the seats on the parade, intending to spend an hour or two there; but, finding the heat and glare rather oppressive, they returned to the house again, and went to sit in the balcony leading from the drawing-room, which was cool and shaded. Each was glad to rest after the exertion; Jean had insisted upon the other taking her arm as usual, but was herself feeling more exhausted than she would have liked to acknowledge. They were sitting silent: Jean on a footstool by her friend's chair, nestling her cheek against the latter's lap, as her eyes dwelt dreamily on the waves that had so lately threatened to engulf her. They could not be seen from within, and were a little startled by presently hearing voices close to them. Floyd and one of the servants of the house had entered the drawing-room, in conversation.

"I say that she ought to be told!" said the house-maid.

"That is easier said than done," replied Floyd.

"Well, it's right down shameful to see the way they go on, that it is! A making love openly before every body's eyes. Why, the boatman who brought up her shawl wouldn't believe me when I said that he was a married man. 'Who's the young lady, then?' he said, giving such a whistle! 'Oh, she's her ladyship's companion,' I said. 'Get along!' he said. 'Her ladyship's companion, indeed! more likely his'n. Why, we all said they was lovers the minute we set eyes on 'em.' And then Mr. Impudence said he only wished his wife would keep such a companion for him!"

Jean had started to her feet, a deep crimson flush dyeing her face to the very roots of her hair. Had she found the key to two or three of Sir Arthur's speeches, which had so puzzled her at the time they were spoken? Then the remark she had made a jest of about their being lovers. Was it possible he could be so wicked—Lady Roughton's husband—to dare to have such thoughts? Ah, the shame of it! For a moment she dared not glance toward the insulted wife. She felt the hand she held grow cold and death-like. "It is because they can say such a thing," thought Jean, "not because she believes it. Oh, surely, surely not; she must know me!"

"He's been making up to her for ever so long," returned Floyd. "Every one of us in the house has seen it. He worships the very ground she treads on, and when her ladyship's taken it won't be many weeks before Miss Bell's made Lady Roughton, you may be sure!"

"Ah, cruel!" murmured Jean, turning her eyes upon her companion. She uttered a cry of dismay. A stony horror had settled in Lady Roughton's face, and her eyes were fixed and glassy. Wounded to the soul that Lady Roughton could for one instant doubt her, was a heavier blow than Jean had ever yet had to bear; the girl withdrew her hand and shrank back. Should she try to exculpate herself? Ah, no; could any explanation alter the fact that she had been doubted, and by the friend who ought to have known her best. She stood a moment looking at the white, rigid face, and the eyes staring so strangely at her—pride, misery, astonishment, and indignation battling for the mastery in her own; then fell at the other's feet. "Is it possible you can think me so wicked? Oh, Lady Roughton, to be doubted by you is worse a thousand times than any thing I've yet had to bear. It is so horrible because I love you! I do love you, dearly; more dearly than any one I have ever known, and I feel that I would give all the world for you to believe in me. Do you think I would kneel here when my heart feels bursting with pride, and tempers, and—oh, one little word—dear lady Roughton, one little look to say you don't believe me to be so treacherous and vile!"

But no word nor look came. There was the same rigid expression in Lady Roughton's white face. Slowly Jean rose to her feet, and she added, in a low, broken voice,

"All the same; I shall know that I have never wronged you, and I shall never forget your goodness to me. I shall love you as long as I live, and no one will ever be the same to me as you have been."

Then, with a last, fond, lingering look, Jean dragged herself away. Her first thought still for Lady Roughton, she rang the bell to summon assistance, the first sound of her voice having caused the servants to hurry away as fast as they could go.

Floyd came in, looking half sullen, half defiant. If it came to the worst, she would have the sympathy of all honest people, at any rate!

"Lady Roughton heard what you were talking about just now, Floyd, and she is ill."

"I am sorry she heard it so plain, Miss Bell," defiantly replied Floyd; for she was quick to perceive that if the news had made her mistress ill, it was proof that she had no previous suspicion of it, and it had come upon her like a shock.

"But it was quite time that she should have some warning of what was going on. It has been quite shameful, that it has! No respectable girl that loved her mistress as I do could stand quietly by and see her wronged."

Jean looked at the girl with calm eyes; Floyd's suspicions mattered nothing; no

one's suspicions mattered now. Besides, if the girl really believed her capable of being what she was accused of, she was right in so speaking.

"I do not blame you, Floyd, if you thought I was so wicked; it was right to be angry, and I am glad you love your mistress—she needs love so much. Oh, Floyd, be good to her. If you are shocked, what must it be to her to believe such a terrible thing! She loved me, you know."

Jean passed the dumbfounded girl, went down-stairs and out of the house—the few steps to the cab-stand—where she engaged a fly to take her to the railway station. Then she returned to the house again, went up to her room, and hastily packed together her small belongings, taking none of the many gifts that had been lavished upon her except the locket containing Lady Roughton's miniature. Slipping on her old black dress and bonnet and cloak, she ran down-stairs again, and got the man to fetch down her trunk. All the available assistance in the house was called to Lady Roughton; Sir Arthur had gone for a sail, and, without one word of farewell, unnoticed and uncared-for, Jean went her way.

## CHAPTER XL.

### "THE DARKNESS DEEPENS."

JEAN found a train just starting, and took a ticket for the London terminus. "Mrs. Brice will take me back again," she thought. She leaned back in the carriage and tried to realize her position. But her temples were throbbing painfully, and she was alternately burning with fever or shivering with cold. She found more and more difficulty in collecting her thoughts, which would stray after any trifle that attracted her eyes. She sat gazing in a numb, far-off sort of way at the country she was speeding through, incapable of realizing any thing very vividly. "Am I going to be ill?" she wondered. "What makes me like this? Why can't I cry, or something? and why does every thing whirl about so? Oh dear, how sorry I am for myself!" It cost her a great effort to claim her luggage when she arrived at the terminus, and then there was the difficulty of taking a cab. Some way she managed to make the cabman understand the directions she gave him, though he once or twice reminded her that Chelsea was not in Broadstairs. Then she was dimly conscious of being whirled through the noisy streets toward Chelsea. But what made Mrs. Brice burst into tears at sight of her, when the cabman beckoned her to the door, and why did they make such a fuss lifting her about? And why would not they let her lie and sleep somewhere—on a chair—anywhere, until she was just a little rested? If they

would only let her alone a few minutes, until she had rested, she pleaded. But, no; first she was lifted from the cab to the little shop, then on to the parlor, and up to the tiny bedroom, before they would let her rest, and even there half a dozen strange women must needs crowd in to help undress her before they would leave her. When at last they left her quiet, there was the sea driving her almost wild with its cruel, threatening waves, advancing nearer and nearer. Why the sea should be there puzzled her a little at first, but she very soon had greater problems than even that to solve in some of the incongruous pictures presented to her.

"What I want to know is, who's to pay for it all?" said Thomas Brice to his wife. "If she ain't got no money to talk of about her, we must speak to Dr. Howard and get her took off to one of the horsepitals. 'Taint likely as I am going to keep her. Them as she was with was pretty sharp to pack her off like that when she was going to be ill! We must look over her trunk, missis, and see if we can't find—"

"She put her purse into my hand to pay the cabman with, Thomas," hesitatingly began Mrs. Brice.

"And how much is there in it?"

"Two pounds six shillings; but—"

"Hand it over for me to take care on for her. There'll be rent and trouble and—all sorts of things—two pound six won't go far. Give it here, I tell you!"

Mrs. Brice reluctantly put the purse into her lord and master's hand.

"Think what a friend miss has been to us, Thomas. Five pounds at one time, you know, and many a pound since."

"That come from the lady she lived with."

"But miss must have put in a good word for us, you know."

"That's all very well; but how are we to know it mightn't have been more? And if the lady's got so much to spare, why can't she help us a bit now when we've got the girl to keep and pay the doctor for, and all that? Where did miss say she lived?"

"I don't remember quite exact," said Mrs. Brice, slightly prevaricating.

"It was in some square, wasn't it?"

"The last time miss came to see me they were going into the country, and the cab brought her from the railway station."

"Well, I'll take good care they sha'n't make me work to keep her when she's got rich friends belonging to her!"

Jean lay tossing in her tiny bed, talking wildly of cruel waves, and entreating forgiveness before she was engulfed in them.

Indeed—indeed she had not tried to win his love from his wife! Would *nobody* believe her? Could not people tell when the truth was spoken?"

The medical man whom Mrs. Brice had called in stood listening gravely to the girl's

ravings, and put some short, stern questions about her antecedents. But his face cleared a little as he heard what Mrs. Brice had to tell—he did not want to believe the worst.

"Is she very ill, sir?"

"Yes, very—dangerously. She will need a good constitution to pull her through. And if you know any thing about her friends, you had better communicate with them. Have you no clue by which to get at them?"

"I am afraid there is none to care much about her, sir. She told me that she was quite alone in the world."

Meanwhile, Jean lay unconscious of her miserable position.

"What is that she is continually turning about in her hands?" one morning asked the doctor.

"It's a sort of locket she wears round her neck, sir; and it seemed to comfort her so much to hold it, that I had not the heart to take it away from her."

"Let me see it." His face darkened as he noted the diamond monogram on the outside. "The old story," he murmured, as he contrived to draw it from her hand a moment. He pressed the spring, and it opened, disclosing the portrait of a beautiful woman. Really glad to find himself mistaken—though circumstances had made him a little hard, he was a good man, and had taken a kindly interest in Jean—he put the locket into her hand again, and advised Mrs. Brice to let it remain round her neck. Then remembering that the little he had seen of Thomas Brice had not impressed him so favorably as did the wife, he added, carelessly, "The thing is a mere gewgaw; but, as she fancies it, better humor her by letting her keep it."

As days passed on, Thomas Brice was getting less and less inclined to listen to his wife's assurances that he would not lose any thing by letting Jean remain. How was he to know that? He was a poor man, and had six mouths to feed already; how was it to be expected that he could keep a stranger? Reluctantly his wife gave him Jean's watch and chain to pawn; then a little gold brooch, and one or two other trinkets of small value, which she found in the little trunk. But she said not a word about the locket round the girl's neck; comforting herself with the reflection that the doctor had said it was of no value.

Meantime many an idle reader of the daily papers was wondering who and what "J. B." could be, who appeared in such great request.

"To J. B.—M. R. entreats you to communicate with her. Your leaving B. was a terrible mistake. M. R. never for one moment misunderstood or doubted you. *No one* is blamed in any way, and you are earnestly

entreated to come or write immediately to your anxious, loving friends, A. and M. R."

"If J. B. will return to D— House, she will find a loving welcome and a happy home. The Miss D's beg her to come back, and Martha longs to see her again."

"To J. B.—Her loving aunt entreats her to return to F—e. M. P. will never enjoy a moment's happiness until she sees her dear J. B. again."

Day after day these advertisements appeared in the *Times* and other papers; then came another:

"On the 3d, Jean Bell, late of Fernside, Raystone, in her eighteenth year."

A few hours after the publication of the last notice Lady Roughton was no more; the Miss Drakes and Martha were in deep affliction, and all the light had gone out of Nugent Orme's life. Although none saw him during his misery, something of what he had endured could be guessed by the traces it left. Maud Poynder—she was Maud Poynder still, the notice of her marriage notwithstanding—knew that all hope for her was gone the first time she saw him after the announcement of Jean's death. She looked at his grave, set face, and fast-whitening hair, and knew the truth had he not told her. But he did tell her. With the deepest pity for the woman who had given him her love and her youth, he yet had the courage to tell her the truth. Jean's death had shown him that they could not be divided: he belonged to her, and she to him, even more in death than in life. He was nearer to her now than he had ever been, and dared not put on the semblance of loving another woman. In a few humbly-spoken, sorrowful words, he let Maud see into his heart. He showed her more than he knew he did; for, in letting her perceive something of his love for Jean, he unconsciously showed that he had never loved before. The bitter pride, and shame, and anger with which she listened! Only she herself knew what she had waded through to reach the goal of her desires, and only she could know her self-abasement to find that she had soiled her soul in vain. She had always managed to preserve some sort of respect for herself. She had never loved doing evil: she had never done it for evil's sake, only in self-defense, against the cruel wrong that had been done her; and she had over and over again promised herself to make ample amends in the future, when once her end was gained. She had pleased herself with all sorts of schemes for doing good. Jean was to come back to live at Fernside immediately after she herself was mistress at the Grange—once the wife of Nugent Orme, she would be above the petty jealousies of ordinary women—in fine,

every thing was to be righted, and all go smooth *after* she had gained her end. But she had not gained it, and the wrong she had done could never be righted now. Whether Maud Poynder would be a better or worse woman for the teachings of experience, did not as yet appear. Trouble was pressing on from other quarters.

Louis Poynder had been for some months married to his first love, Jessie, and Jessie was getting troublesome in more ways than one. He had taken a small house just out of Raystone, the opposite end of the town to Fernside; and, to begin with, Jessie did not approve of small houses. She wanted to be living in what she termed style, that her old acquaintances might recognize how much she was above them. Then she wanted to be in society. She had not married to be hidden out of sight like this, as though there was any thing to be ashamed of! Where was the use of having jewelry, and lovely dresses, and all that, when there was no one to show them to? she asked. To adorn herself for her husband's admiration, was, he soon found, considered to be quite a work of supererogation; and Jessie in deshabille, without the edges of her eyelids darkened, eyebrows penciled, or hair colored, was but a faded specimen of humanity, compared with Jessie the brilliant (the fascinations of manner seemed to be put on with the other adornments of coloring) behind the pastry-cook's counter. When she was, as she termed it, "dressed," her husband still occasionally admired her; but there were intervals, getting more and more frequent, when he thought she was but mortal, and, what was worse, told her so. Then she could not be made to understand that there was any necessity to remain in the background with his relations. She was his lawful wife, and why couldn't she be more intimate with his mother and sister? She would have him to know that she was quite as good as they, and meant to let them see she considered herself to be so. It wasn't as if he had married an ignorant servant of all work; no, indeed! She'd have them to know that she could play on the piano, and had learned French for three months. Why could not she have a carriage to drive about in and keep waiting before the shops? Every body said the Poynders were very rich, and she did not see why she should not enjoy some of the advantages of being rich. Why could not Louis let her leave cards at all the great houses, when she had had that beautiful case made on purpose? Above all, why did not his sister fraternize more with her? The disagreeable thing never so much as returned her a kiss, and, when she went to Fernside to call, never asked her to stay to dinner, though she could not say that she was not dressed enough. She had not a cheap thing about her, and wore all her



bracelets and things. "Then, to refuse to come to dinner with us, and only call. If you'd any spirit, you'd not put up with that from your own mother and sister."

"I can't make them take to you if they won't. I told you not to go to Fernside dressed to death as you were. Ladies do not walk about like that in the morning."

"You didn't use to complain about my dress. You always said you admired a little dash."

"I suppose I did behind a counter; but it is not quite so becoming in private life."

"What did you marry me for?" sobbed Jessie. "Because—" Louis Poynder had begun of late to tell himself, "because he was a fool;" but he had not as yet been quite so frank with his wife. "There, dry your eyes, or that black stuff will be running down your cheeks. What's the good of squabbling?"

"I don't want to squabble; but I'm not going to be kept down like this much longer. I'll show them all I'm as good as them."

"I wish you could!" bitterly.

Meantime, in anticipation of her time of triumph, she spent so much money, ordering any and every incongruous ornament and luxury that was shown her, that bills were rapidly accumulating. As marriage did not limit Louis Poynder's own necessities, he was always making fresh demands upon his mother. But both he and his sister found Mrs. Poynder growing more and more difficult to manage respecting money matters. She, who in her season of comparative poverty had been yielding to weakness, unable to refuse her children any thing, could now only with the greatest difficulty be got to sign a small check. It was no use their reminding her that her income exceeded five thousand a year, that she did not spend half that, that the money was accumulating, etc. Nothing they could say seemed to have any other effect than to make her more depressed. Moreover, they knew that she was making unceasing efforts to find Jean. Watch her as they might, she was always sending advertisements to the papers entreating her dear J. B. to return to her.

Then, to Maud's dismay, she found out that her mother, who had always been a consistent church-woman, took to attending prayer-meetings held in a back lane over some stables by a ranting cobbler of some exaggerated persuasion, and was what was termed "exercised in spirit," with the rest of the saints forming the small congregation. Soon rumors were all over the town that not only had Mrs. Poynder been converted, but that she had accused herself before the astonished open-mouthed saints at a prayer-meeting of having done something wrong about a will, and kept money that was not her own.

The news spread like wild-fire, and then

came the hardest trial in Maud Poynder's life. If she could have hidden her mother away from the prying visitors who were constantly coming to Fernside, how gladly would she have done it! But she dared not; she knew that worse would be inferred from her mother's absence than her presence, and dared not attempt to keep her back. Terrible as it was, she was obliged to endure it as best she might. Neither entreaties nor threats were of the slightest avail with her mother now. Maud could only talk as much as possible herself, to draw the attention of the visitors from her mother. But there remained the stubborn fact of Mrs. Poynder in tears, wringing her hands, and uttering occasional ejaculations about her lost soul for the edification of her hearers. It was all very well for Maud to whisper little asides about poor dear mamma being weak, and having unfortunately got into bad hands, getting old before her time, growing almost childish, etc. One and all agreed that there could not be an effect without some cause. It was clear that poor Maria Poynder must know best, when she accused herself of being a miserable sinner; none but a guilty person would go so far as that out—of church. And very soon people began to put two and two together, and talk about Jean's disappearance just as the Poynders came into their property.

Then came the announcement of Jean's death, and Maud had read it to her mother, fancying that when she knew that there was no hope, she would become more calm and reconciled. But it had not the desired effect; Mrs. Poynder grew worse rather than better, and her daughter entirely lost her influence over her. The only person she cared to see was Miss Orme, and that lady's visits were terribly trying to her daughter. Of late, Maud had not hesitated to show her estimation of her old friend, and the little lady had been shocked and astonished beyond measure. That her dear Maud could be capable of saying such things to one she had always professed to love and admire was quite a revelation to her. She was beginning to wonder whether it was possible that Jemima Orme had been deceived, and her dear Maud was not quite so perfect as she had always imagined her to be! But she did what she conceived it to be her duty to do all the same. It should never be said that she had kept away from Fernside in the season of trial. Moreover, she had the comfort of knowing that her visits were, at any rate, welcome to poor Maria Poynder, though the latter's revelations caused her to return to the Grange each time with a graver face.

"My dear Nugent," she at length confided to her nephew, "I am afraid that there really is some truth in the dreadful rumor that has got about. Poor Maria told me herself

this afternoon that some wrong was done about the will."

"What will?"

"Well, you know it was said—and she says so now herself—that her brother left a will, giving the whole or best part of the property to the poor girl who is dead, and that the will was suppressed. Very shocking—such a dreadful scandal about people like the Poynders! Moreover, Maria says that poor Jean (it had come to be poor Jean with Miss Orme now) was sent into the world penniless. Now, you know, it was always said that Jean ran away for the worst of reasons. Maud hinted to me that there was something disreputable about her flight—that she had gone away with some one, and had the audacity to tell them she chose that kind of life. But," magnanimously went on the little lady, "from what Maria tells me, I firmly believe that was a mistake. Indeed, I fear Maud must have judged poor Jean a little too harshly, if she did not really force her to leave Fernside. My dear boy!" she ejaculated, nervously, as her nephew strode out of the room, overturning her work-table and two or three footstools by the way. Then, in soliloquy, "Dear Nugent, how deeply he must have loved her! He seems almost beside himself at the bare mention of her name."

## CHAPTER XLI.

### FIFTY POUNDS REWARD.

ONE other advertisement in the *Times*:

"*Fifty Pounds Reward.*—Any person able to give information respecting Jean Bell, late of Fernside, Raystone, will confer a lasting benefit upon her loving, sorrowing aunt, Maria Poynder, of that place, and receive the above reward."

"What will you do next?" ejaculated Maud, angrily throwing down the paper. "To put your name and address, as though we had not been disgraced enough! Fifty pounds, too! We shall have all the adventurers in the kingdom about us."

"Oh, Maud, what does it matter, if we only hear of her? It would be worth a hundred times as much to know she had forgiven us at the last. She may have; she was always so good and kind, you know."

Two days later, Nugent Orme called at Fernside. He had seen Mrs. Poynder's advertisement, and called in the forlorn hope of hearing she had received some sort of news. Of late, he had felt that she was, so to speak, working with him. He had never ceased seeking Jean since she left Fernside—having had agents employed in all directions, and had never succeeded in obtaining the smallest clue. He had no need to question Mrs. Poynder. She had but one subject

to talk about now, and introduced it to every one she saw.

"This is only the second day since the advertisement appeared, you know, Nugent," she eagerly began. "There may be some news to-day. Ah, if she has only forgiven us! It would be some small comfort to know that at the last she forgave—"

"Mamma has had some peculiar delusions lately, as I dare say you have heard," said Maud, with a white face. This was the first time her mother had taken Nugent Orme into her confidence, and she was overwhelmed with shame and confusion, though she tried to carry matters with a high hand. "And one of her unfortunate delusions is, that my uncle left a will in which he passed over his sister and left all his property to his illegitimate child."

"If we had only given it up at once!" sobbed Mrs. Poynder. "Jean was always kind and generous, and I'm sure she would not have allowed us to want. But we sinned, and our sin has found us out!"

"You use such very strong language, mamma. Even Nugent could not, I think, see the necessity for my uncle's nearest relatives giving up property which directly descended to them." He could only make an indefinite sort of bow, and she went on: "Jean herself had the sense to acknowledge the justice of the money coming to you, mamma. You know she did."

"Oh, Jean, Jean! If you could come back but for one moment, to say you forgive—"

The door softly opened, and Jean, thin, and white, and ghost-like, but with the old wistful yearning in the brown eyes, stood on the threshold. For the moment they stared at her as if she had, indeed, been called back from the other world by her aunt's wild entreaties, though they might have seen that her shabby black clothes were terribly real. A little afraid of what their silence might mean, she advanced slowly and timidly into the room.

"I saw the advertisement, Aunt Maria. Dear Aunt Maria, is it true—did it really come from you? It said my loving aunt, and seemed as if you wished to see me again?" she asked, in a low, faltering voice, looking pleadingly from one to the other. They could not utter a word, and she went on with ashen face and trembling lips; "I—I am afraid it was only a dream. I have been ill, you know, and have had such terrible dreams till this came!"

Her aunt's arms were round her neck, and she was sobbing out her joy and thankfulness unmistakably enough, if rather incoherently. But Mrs. Poynder was unceremoniously put aside, and Jean found herself in Nugent Orme's arms. He absolutely laughed at her weak efforts to escape; in truth, his senses were reeling. Strong as he

was, this sudden transition from death to life was almost more than he could bear.

"Ah, the shame of it! Let me go!"

"Let you go!" he ejaculated. "Do you think I will ever let you go again?" wildly kissing her brow, and cheeks, and lips. But he presently became aware that she was unconscious of his kisses, and then came the wild terror lest he had lost her again. But nothing they said could induce him to relinquish his hold of her. He laid her on the couch as they bade him, but kept one arm round her while bathing her brow and lips with the restoratives which were hastily brought, and it was no use trying to persuade him that they could do it better.

How terribly death-like she looked! How changed since they had seen her last; so thin, and hollow-eyed, and shrunken-cheeked! In truth she was but in the first stage of recovery from the low fever, which Dr. Howard told Mrs. Brice only her naturally good constitution had carried her through. Her greatest bar to recovery had been her carelessness about it. They could not get her to take interest in any thing; in fact, she almost hoped to drift into the other life. In the event of her death, she had confided a scrap of paper to Mrs. Brice, to be sent to her aunt. She knew that burial would not be refused her. It was at this crisis that she lighted upon her aunt's advertisement. Mrs. Brice had borrowed the *Times* from the public-house in the street, with the hope that it might afford a little amusement to the invalid; it went to her heart to see the young girl so hopeless and careless about getting well again. Not to seem ungrateful to her kind friend, Jean glanced at the front page, and then her eyes had happened to fall upon her aunt's advertisement.

Terribly irate was Thomas Brice when he ascertained that if he had only caught sight of the advertisement in time, he might have secured that fifty pounds, to say nothing of the expenses incurred by Jean's illness, which he had already persuaded himself had been very great. Poor Mrs. Brice was quite alive to the fact that fifty pounds was a very large sum, and all that it would have done for them in their present sore need. But she comforted herself with the reflection that they had no right to expect it, and that she could hardly have borne such good fortune as that all at once. Then, if her dear Miss Bell was going to be taken into favor by her friends again, what a blessing that would be! How much it would cheer her on at her work again to know that Jean was happy at last!

Jean was feverishly anxious to set forth at once, putting aside all objections, and, with the nervous irritability of one in the first stages of convalescence, insisting that she was quite equal to the fatigue.

"It says, my loving aunt—loving, sorrow-

ing aunt. So she must want to see me, you know!" excitedly exclaimed the girl, taking up the paper again and again to feast her eyes on the words.

"So it do, deary; and if you want to go, go you shall."

And she set cheerfully to work, preparing Jean for the journey, turning over all sorts of schemes in her mind for getting the necessary funds. She saw that the cost of the journey had not occurred to the young girl, and determined to spare her that anxiety, if possible. After some difficulty, she succeeded in borrowing the required sum from the baker's wife, by promising to work it out, but not without having her weakness in doing so much for a stranger pointed out to her. She accompanied Jean in the cab to the railway station, the latter being too weak to go alone, and placed her comfortably as she could in a second-class carriage, auguring all sorts of good to come of the expedition.

"And you'll come home again, if you feels inclined, won't you, deary? Dr. Howard was telling me something about wanting a governess to teach his little girls, this morning, so there's something to look forward to if you comes back, isn't there?" she said, in case of Jean's hopes being disappointed. "God bless you, deary! I can't a-bear to say good-bye. You won't forget to take a sup of wine and a bit of biscuit now and then as you goes along, will you?"

The "wine" was a gill of port which Mrs. Brice had purchased out of her farthings, and put into a phial. She stood nodding and smiling till the train moved off, then wiped her eyes, and turned her steps homeward again, the long walk seeming longer in her anxiety lest some catastrophe might have happened to her children during her absence.

The doctor, who was hastily summoned to Fernside, saw that Jean's was no mere fainting fit, and looked very grave as he informed them that she must have had some serious illness from which she had scarcely recovered, and that this was more the effects of debility and exhaustion than any thing else. She would require great care for some little time to come, though not medical care, perhaps.

"Bring your best port, and give her a little frequently for the present, and set your cook to work at once to make good beef-tea and any thing else you can get her to take in the way of nourishment."

As Jean recovered a little, she so unmistakably shrank from Nugent Orme's arm, that Dr. Travers bade him withdraw it. "And perhaps you would be good enough to stand back a little—where she does not see you for the present, Mr. Orme." He added, in a little aside, "Invalids are privileged to be fanciful, you know, and we doctors are

the only men able to be of any use at times like these. Now, my dear, good friend!" he added, to Mrs. Poynder, who had sunk sobbing on her knees by Jean's side; "really you know—"

But Jean weakly put out her arms.

"Dear Aunt Maria!"

"Oh, my darling! my dear, cruelly used child! how 'good of you, how merciful, to forgive!—"

Dr. Travers shrugged his shoulders. They were bent upon having a scene, and must have their way, he supposed. Still, he could see that this kind of excitement was different from the other. So he stood aside a few moments. After they had expended a little of their superabundant energies, and thoroughly exhausted the girl again, he would be wanted, of course.

"Forgive?" murmured bewildered Jean.

"Dear, kind Aunt Maria, what can I have to forgive?"

"Ah, you don't know; but you are generous and kind. If we had only been content to trust to your generosity in the beginning—if we had but shown you the will!"

"Mamma, you do not know what you are talking about!" sharply interrupted Maud, touching her mother's shoulder. "No wonder she does not understand you."

"But I must tell her."

"Nonsense! Come with me, mamma. There is nothing to tell, and Dr. Travers has told you Jean wants rest and quiet."

"I must tell her! It is useless praying for forgiveness until restitution has been made. My darling, there was a will. Your father left—"

"Hush, Aunt Maria!" whispered Jean.

"What does it matter? The money is rightly yours. Pray do not trouble about that."

Maud breathed a little more freely. "I told you Jean would recognize the justice of the case, mamma. Poor mamma has got it into her head that there was a will in your favor, Jean, and—"

"I found it!" sobbed Mrs. Poynder. "I showed it to you, and you read it, Maud—you know you did! If you would only have let me give it to her, my soul would not have been—"

"I can only say that if there was such a will it disappeared," said Maud. "If the piece of paper you showed me really was a will—"

"It was—it was—and I have never had a moment's peace since it disappeared! I never shall till she gets her rights!"

"Dear Aunt Maria," hesitated Jean, "if it will make you happier to know it, I have the will in my own possession."

"You!" they ejaculated, in the wildest amazement.

"You know you promised to give me papa's desk. The day before I left Fern-

side I went into your room to speak to you, and, until you came, amused myself by looking at the desk. It was open, you know, and I did not think there could be any thing of any consequence in it; but in the little drawer I found the will. I did not guess that you had seen it, and when I found that papa had left the money to me, I determined you should never know, and took it away with me. I did not care about having the money, and I knew you had always believed it would be yours from the beginning; it is yours. I took it away with me when I left Fernside, and did not destroy it because I liked to look at papa's signature and fancy it was his love-gift to me; but I will destroy it now, of course."

Maud's face was buried in her hands, her mother was utterly speechless, and Nugent Orme was kissing the hem of the faded and travel-stained dress, his lips trembling with a mighty emotion.

Jean strove to withdraw her dress from his hold, a faint color tingeing her cheeks as she turned her eyes, nervously and apologetically, toward Maud. Dr. Travers felt terribly *de trop*. He was quite keen-sighted enough to know that he would not be liked any the better by-and-by for having been present at such a disclosure. With a little preparatory cough of warning, he turned from the window, where he had stationed himself, and advanced toward the group with as unconscious and matter-of-fact an air as he could assume.

"Too much talking, and very rambling talk I dare say it is. A very little serves to excite you just now, young lady. Yes, I see," touching Jean's pulse; "but what we want is quiet, and prosy beef and mutton for a time." Then he added, in a little aside, "I advise your getting her to bed as soon as possible, and keeping the house quiet, or we shall have a serious relapse."

At which, each did his or her best to suppress any sign of emotion, and, difficult as they found the task, contrived to calm down a little.

Giving a few simple directions, and promising to send a composing draught, Dr. Travers took leave, musing over the revelation that he had heard as he walked home. It was not the first time that an odd bit of family history had been unwittingly revealed to him in his professional career. But the Poynders! Maud Poynder (he saw at once that the mother had only been her tool), the pattern woman of the county! Well, it was pleasant to reflect that the other came up to his expectations. Dr. Travers liked to find himself right quite as much as do other people. "Orme seemed to have become quite awake to her value now, at any rate," he thought, with an agreeable remembrance of his own verdict and Nugent Orme's surprise at it, some time before. "Just the girl to

do an act of that kind, and never know she was doing an exceptional thing!"

Jean's distress at seeing Nugent Orme kneeling by her side grew so evident that he stumbled to his feet and stood out of sight again, though he did not remove his eyes from her. Uttering all sorts of incoherent ejaculations of thankfulness, Mrs. Poynder hurried away to see that Jean's old room was comfortably prepared for her reception. She lay with closed eyes a few moments, until Maud stooped down and put some wine to her lips.

"How kind of you, dear Maud! You will not mind my staying with aunt Maria now, will you?" Then she added, in a low voice, "When I thought I was dying, I prayed for your happiness with him—not only with my lips. Do believe it."

"Don't, I can not bear it!"

"You are not afraid of me now!" ejaculated Jean, in a wounded voice. "Dear Maud, can not you trust me now? Do you think I could be so wicked as to—"

"Hush! You are thinking of the miserable lie about the marriage," returned Maud, in an agony of shame and compunction. It had been her stratagem to deprive Jean of all hope, and prevent her returning to Fernside; and she had inserted the notice of Jean's death in the *Times* to induce Nugent Orme and her mother to give up their efforts to find her.

Probably he saw little into the woman's soul at that moment, and knew that she was suffering justly, after all. She was reaping what she herself, and not what others, had sown.

"Lie?" murmured Jean, a faint color fluttering into her cheeks again. "Then are you not?"

"I shall never be Nugent Orme's wife, and"—she added, bitterly—"if it will do you any good to know it, I do not now wish to be." No, not now she had sunk so low in his eyes. It would have been torture to her proud spirit to be his wife, now he saw her as she was. Did not she know from bitter experience how uncompromising (now she called it hard and merciless) he was? Had not she known his love for Jean, she told herself that she would never have consented to be his wife now. Poor Maud! she suffered terribly, and it was not yet given her to perceive the use of her suffering, or to realize the possibility of being a better woman for not having gained her ends.

Jean lay with closed eyes a few moments. When she opened them Maud had softly closed the door, and Nugent Orme was kneeling by her side. He dared not speak, but probably his eyes spoke for him, for she knew—after one little shy glance into them, she knew—leaned forward, put both her arms round his neck, and lifted up her mouth to be kissed. He fought hard against himself

—he had been denied so long; but he overcame, and pressed only one kiss upon the sweet lips.

"My wife!"

"The happiness of it! Oh, Nugent, how shall I bear it?"

He remembered Dr. Travers's warning, and steadied himself, speaking as much like a sane man as he could.

"I suppose I shall have to help you bear it—eh, Jean?"

"Say Jean twice over?" she asked, hungrily.

"Jean! Jean!"

"It is even better!" she murmured.

"There's no sorrow in it now!"

He looked down at the delicate face lying on his breast, and the transparent fingers weakly twining in his own, and was almost glad when Mrs. Poynder re-entered the room, so afraid was he of losing his self-control under the weight of this sudden joy.

"Every thing is ready, my dear child. Will you come now? Lean upon me, dear; or perhaps there had better be two. I will ring for one of the maids."

"No," gravely said Nugent Orme, lifting the light burden in his arms, "she will never lean upon any one but me again."

## CHAPTER XLII.

### SUNSHINE.

WHEN Jean awoke—she had fallen into the sleep of exhaustion as soon as they laid her in bed—she found herself once more in her pretty room at Fernside, with tender, loving Aunt Maria bending over her, anxious to begin a course of petting. She did not refuse the restoratives they brought her, but they noticed that she appeared anxious and bewildered.

"Was I very ill when I came, dear Aunt Maria?" she at length inquired, with downcast eyes, plaiting the coverlet between her fingers.

"Yes, dear child."

"And my head was bad, wasn't it?"

"You were weak after an illness, and had come out too soon, my love."

"Yes. It was a dream, then; of course, it must have been a dream!" thought Jean, turning wearily away, and covering her face with her thin hands. "A cruel dream!"

"Jean, dear," hesitated Mrs. Poynder, "Nugent was very anxious for me to give you this note when you are sufficiently rested to—"

"No, now! Give it to me at once. I can not wait, Aunt Maria?"

The latter looked a little doubtfully at the sudden flush that covered the young girl's face, and seemed so like fever, but ventured to put the note into her eagerly outstretched hand.

Jean tore it open with trembling fingers.

"My darling, think how hard this is for me, and get strong as fast as you can. I am afraid to say more now than that I am yours; but try to imagine all that is meant by my being yours. NUGENT."

He got a tiny note in return, written with trembling fingers in pencil:

"Oh, Nugent, dear, I am so thankful it is true! I was afraid it was only a dream. I love you—I love you—I love you!"

Then she eagerly took the nourishing things they brought her, and sunk into happy slumber again, with her precious love-letter laid under her cheek.

They were afraid, as yet, to ask her any questions about the past; but her worn and frequently mended dress, and poor, shabby shoes, told something of what she had passed through. They knew, too, that she would never have parted with her father's watch and chain but from some dire need.

When Jean began to rally again, she began to think of her kind friend, Mrs. Brice. "How anxious she must be to know how I was received!" thought Jean. So, in reply to her lover's question, "Is there *nothing* I can do? I am getting dreadfully envious of your kind nurses," she gave him the address, and asked him to go to Chelsea for her, and explain to her dear Mrs. Brice how kindly she had been received at Fernside, and how happy she was. "Dear, kind Mrs. Brice gave me shelter, and nursed me through my illness like a tender mother. She has been more kind and good to me than I could find words to tell you, and I love her dearly. She will show you my little trunk, and if you will look under the leather pad at the bottom of it you will find the will. Please, Nugent, dear, give her my dear love, and some money. She shared everything she had with me, but we were very poor."

How poor they had been he could hardly realize until he visited Mrs. Brice. He went immediately up to town, and drove to the address Jean had given him.

"Are you Mrs. Brice?" he asked, entering the shop, and doubtfully addressing the poor careworn-looking woman, with an infant in her arms, who came out from a back room to see what he wanted.

"Yes, sir," courtesying shyly.

"I have come from Miss Bell."

"Miss Bell!" she ejaculated, delightedly. Then, noticing his grave looks—he had hardly expected to find such poverty as was evident here—she added, "Oh, sir, she isn't worse? They haven't never been so cruel as to be unkind to my deary when she was so ill? My heart has been a'most broke about her."

"No; she is steadily improving, and very

happy, though the excitement told on her a little at first."

Mrs. Brice burst into tears of joy.

"May I come in, Mrs. Brice?"

"You're kindly welcome, I'm sure, sir," lifting the flap in the counter.

He followed her into the little room, trying not to show his sense of its desolation. This, then, had been his darling's home! After she had got over her first shyness in talking to her grand visitor, who seemed to have such an exaggerated notion about her kindness to her dear Miss Bell, she was very glad to talk to him about her.

"What she went through, poor dear, nobody can tell! We as have never known any thing better are used to it, you see, sir; but for a young delicate thing like her to be a-walking about after situations till the shoes were dropping off her feet, and a-putting up with people's sharp ways! She was so cheerful about it all, too, never saying a cross word, and so laughing about her inconvenient appetite, poor dear! pinching herself more and more every day, and—"

"Hush!" And, to Mrs. Brice's great surprise, her visitor started to his feet and abruptly walked out of the house. He walked about the streets, going he hardly knew whither; but, to Mrs. Brice's great relief, he returned in about an hour, calm and quiet again.

At his request, Mrs. Brice brought down Jean's battered little trunk, smiling at the idea of its being too heavy for her. He looked curiously down at it as the good woman showed him its very few contents, apologetically explaining,

"You see, sir, she never had much, and what few things she had that we could make any money of was pawned. When it come to a question of life and death, and food got scarce, I pawned all I could."

He lifted the leather pad at the bottom of the trunk, where Jean had told him to look, and found the will. He stood for a moment gazing down at it in his hand. While she had been half-starved and clothed, there had lain her claim to five thousand a year!

"I will take this with me, Mrs. Brice."

"Certainly, sir," returned unconscious Mrs. Brice, seeing nothing but some folded paper.

"Will you be good enough to bring me pen and ink?"

A little wonderingly, she brought them to him, and watched him take a book from his pocket, fill up one of the leaves with writing, and tear it out. She had never before seen a check written, and had no idea of the value of the piece of paper which he put into her hands. She did not realize it until he had left her, and she had spelled the words over and over again, and then taken counsel of the baker's wife about it.

"This is for your present need, Mrs. Brice" (he would as readily have made it five hundred

dred as twenty, in his joy and gratitude, but restricted himself to the latter sum as enough to begin with; afterward it would be Jean's privilege to be her friend's benefactor; "and when she is able to talk the matter over with you, something will be done to place you out of the reach of want for the future. Meantime, she sends her dear love to you."

"God bless her! She knows I love her, sir."

"Yes; you have given the best proof of that."

Then, hushing her babe to her breast, Mrs. Brice timidly asked, "May I make so bold as to ask if your name is Nugent, sir?"

"Yes, my name is Nugent Orme."

"Ah, then, I know she is going to be happy! That name was always on her lips when she was lying insensible, sir."

He smilingly shook hands with Mrs. Brice, patted Sissy's and Susy's cheeks, and even found himself kissing baby.

Jean slowly regained her strength, and then came her happiness. Meantime, Nugent Orme had been in communication with the Miss Drakes and Sir Arthur Roughton. The latter visited the Grange before going to Fernside, and the two men had a long interview, but what transpired was not communicated to Jean. It was not necessary to tell her, and her mother had not desired she should be told; but Nugent Orme knew all. Mary Raymond had left her husband and young daughter sixteen years before; and, although Sir Arthur Roughton had married her immediately they had the news of her husband's death, it was because he was more honorable than many men in the same position, and not because his love had endured till then. Theirs had not been the kind of love which endures. The locket containing the miniature likeness of Lady Roughton is still Jean's most precious treasure, though she does not know her by any other name than friend.

But there was one subject about which Jean could not be made amenable to reason. Although her aunt begged her to act upon the will, she persistently refused. Why could not they take the money, and have done with it? She did not want it, and wouldn't have it. But Maud was on her mother's side now. If there were not some better reason for wishing Jean to have her own springing up in Maud's heart, she knew that it would never do for them to take the property, now that the truth was known.

"You can allow mamma what you please, you know, Jean. She would have no delicacy about accepting a small allowance from you, as she was my uncle's sister, and he had certainly promised to provide for her; but you must act by the will now."

"No; I can not, Maud. Nugent will not care about my having money, and it's no use; I *will* not have it."

"You do not realize the value of the fortune, Jean. I do not think that even now you have learned the value of money."

"I know that the very smallest chop you can buy costs fourpence, and half an ounce of tea three halfpence, Maud," laughed Jean. She went on more gravely, "But it is not a question of the value; I object to receive any thing by the will."

And they found she remained firm. But they knew it would not do to yield to so Quixotic an idea, and at length appealed to Nugent Orme. He listened to their persuasions, and Jean's objections uttered so decidedly—almost angrily; then said, quietly,

"You have some reason you have not mentioned, Jean?"

"Yes, Nugent." Then, with downcast eyes and flushed cheeks, she burst out, "The money can not make up to me for the wrong done to my mother, and—I told Maud you did not want me to be rich, Nugent?"

"Do what you please about it, Jean."

"May I? just what I please?"

"Your reason for not accepting the property being what you consider to be an injustice done to your mother?"

"Yes."

"Then do exactly as you wish."

She ran straight up to her room, brought down the will, placed it upon the fire, and, with her hand in his, watched her large inheritance shrivel to nothingness.

He took a small sealed packet from his pocket, and placed it in her hand.

"For me? Am I to open it, Nugent?"

"It is your mother's legacy to you, my darling—her only one."

"My mother's!" With eager fingers, Jean broke the seal. Two papers. The certificate of marriage between Mary Bell with Oliver Raymond at a London church, and the certificate of the baptism of their daughter Jean in India, a year later.

"Oh, Nugent, I am the same as other people!"

"But I don't know that you are quite the same as other people, Jean, even now," smiling to himself at the bare idea of any one being like her.

"Ah, you are thinking about my not being so clever, and things. But my dear mother was the same as other people's mothers, you know, though I shall always be glad to remember that it made no difference to you; and—Nugent, how did you get this?" the question suddenly arising in her own mind.

"It was intrusted to me by one to whom your mother gave it before her death, Jean. But he did not wish his name to be known. Will you let me humor him?"

"Of course; what does it matter? I am Jean Raymond now."

"I consented to your burning your father's will, so that your aunt and cousin

might see you were in earnest; but they know that you are your father's heir all the same." After Mrs. Poynder and Mand had quit the room, he added, "Had it not been so, I should not have quietly assented to so large an inheritance passing out of your hands—decidedly not, unless I had been quite sure of its being as usefully employed as you will in time learn to employ it, my Jean."

"But Nugent, dear, my aunt—?"

"You ought to make a good provision for your aunt, and a fair one for your cousins after her death."

"Half, do you think?"

"Five hundred a year during your aunt's life, and half that same sum divided between your cousins afterward, would be very generous."

And so, as soon as the law business could be got through, it was settled.

Sir Arthur Roughton finds occasion to visit Fernside more frequently as time goes on, and Mand Poynder is beginning to think of abandoning an idea she had for a time entertained of joining a sisterhood. Moreover, she enters pleasantly into the gossip over the preparations for Jean's approaching marriage, and is a great reference as to the etiquette to be observed. Had the arrangements been left to the lovers, things would have been conducted in the most unorthodox manner. Indeed, they are rarely to be found when a consultation has to be held, and are quite regardless of appearances, Nugent carrying off his bride-elect (to the dismay of the army of milliners and dress-makers besieging Fernside) to the Grange, where they spend the long summer days, sometimes in the woods, sometimes in the library, in delightful anticipation of the life before them. He knows it will not lose its zest. More than ductile as she is in some respects, there will be delightful little discussions between them, in which Jean will hold her own, however he may pretend to differ from her. And as in reality each will be striving less to seem than to be right, their atmosphere will always be clear and healthy.

Meantime Mrs. Brice has not been forgotten. A pretty cottage has been neatly furnished for her (it is understood to be done specially for her) in the adjacent village. Johnny, who has been allowed to choose his own future path in life, is on his way to Australia; and in time, when he is disillusioned respecting the fortunes to be found ready made, he may be induced to work for one. Sissy and Susy very much approve of their change of abode and happy country life, and are beginning to feel a great deal more respect for the mother to whom they are told they owe it all.

Nugent Orme has taken Thomas Brice's measure.

"You believe you are capable of doing some great work for humanity. Very good;

you are the man for the age, and you shall have every opportunity for the exercise of your talent. For one year, or, if necessary, longer, you shall give your whole time and energies to the work, with ample funds at your disposal. If I find that you can help to raise or in any way improve your own class, I promise that you shall never lack the means. You will find me quite as much interested in the question as you yourself can be. But it must be fully understood that if during that time you have made no progress toward proving your capacity for such work, it will be your duty to at once return to any other kind of work you may be competent to do, without for the future rating yourself at higher value than the wages you earn."

It may here be stated that Thomas Brice attended a great many meetings, made a great many speeches, and commenced writing a book. But some way, as time went on, humanity did not appear to be much "raised" by the work, and it might be that his free access to his patron's library rather impeded his progress than otherwise. So many things he thought of turned out to have been thought of before, and, what was worse, to have been replied to. After his probation Thomas Brice grumblingly returned to the carpenter's "spear" again; and, though he will never be a skilled workman, he does more toward feeding the mouths at home than he had ever before done. Whether he would do as much if he could say work was scarce, and Nugent Orme had not an unpleasant habit of ascertaining precisely how much he earned, and reminded him of the smallness of the amount, is doubtful. Most probably he would prefer going back to old times, when he was a hero in his own eyes without being called upon to prove it.

But Mrs. Brice is a happy woman in her neat, comfortable new home. She knows that neither she nor hers will ever be allowed to be in poverty again, and she is never long without a visit from Jean.

It is the night previous to the wedding, and there is all the customary excitement of such occasions at Fernside. In spite of the pleadings of the two most concerned, their friends have determined that the wedding is to be a grand one. Martha, who considered it necessary herself to bring her dear old mistresses' presents to Fernside, and Mrs. Brice are to share the privilege of dressing the bride on the wedding morning. Mrs. Poynder seems to have forgotten her soul in the excitement! Little Miss Orme nods and smiles approval of it all, under the impression that she has been of wonderful assistance in bringing it about. Sir Arthur Roughton has recovered his loss, and looks a younger and a brighter man. Even Mand looks approvingly on, smiling and blushing very becomingly when Annie Brayleigh



whispers a question as to when another event is to come off. Although Maud's will never be the highest type of morality, she has learned a severe lesson, and is all the better for learning it.

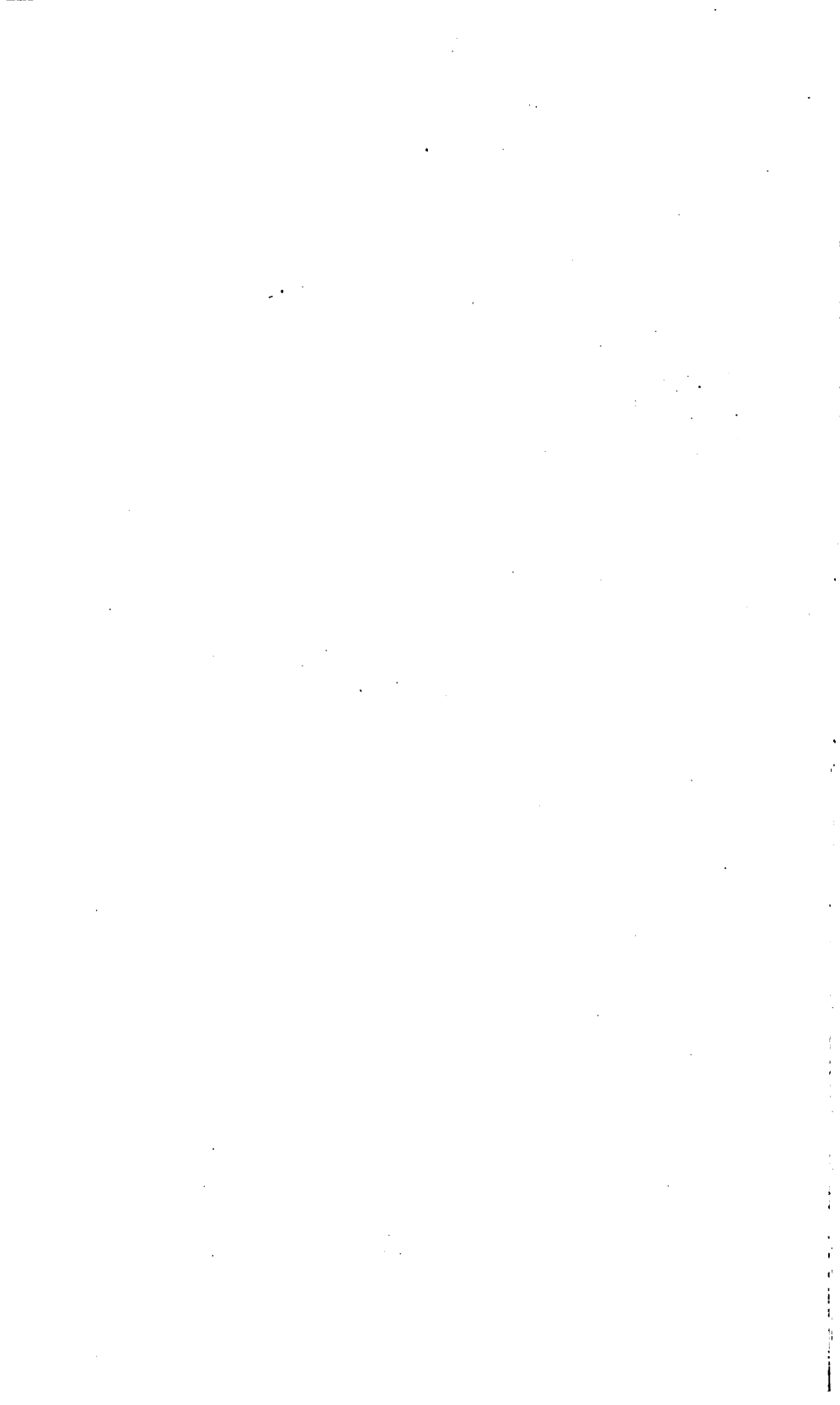
Nugent Orme has drawn Jean apart to make quite sure about the fit of the ring. She lays her cheek upon his breast, and lifts up the little gold-circleted finger to be kissed in Jean fashion.

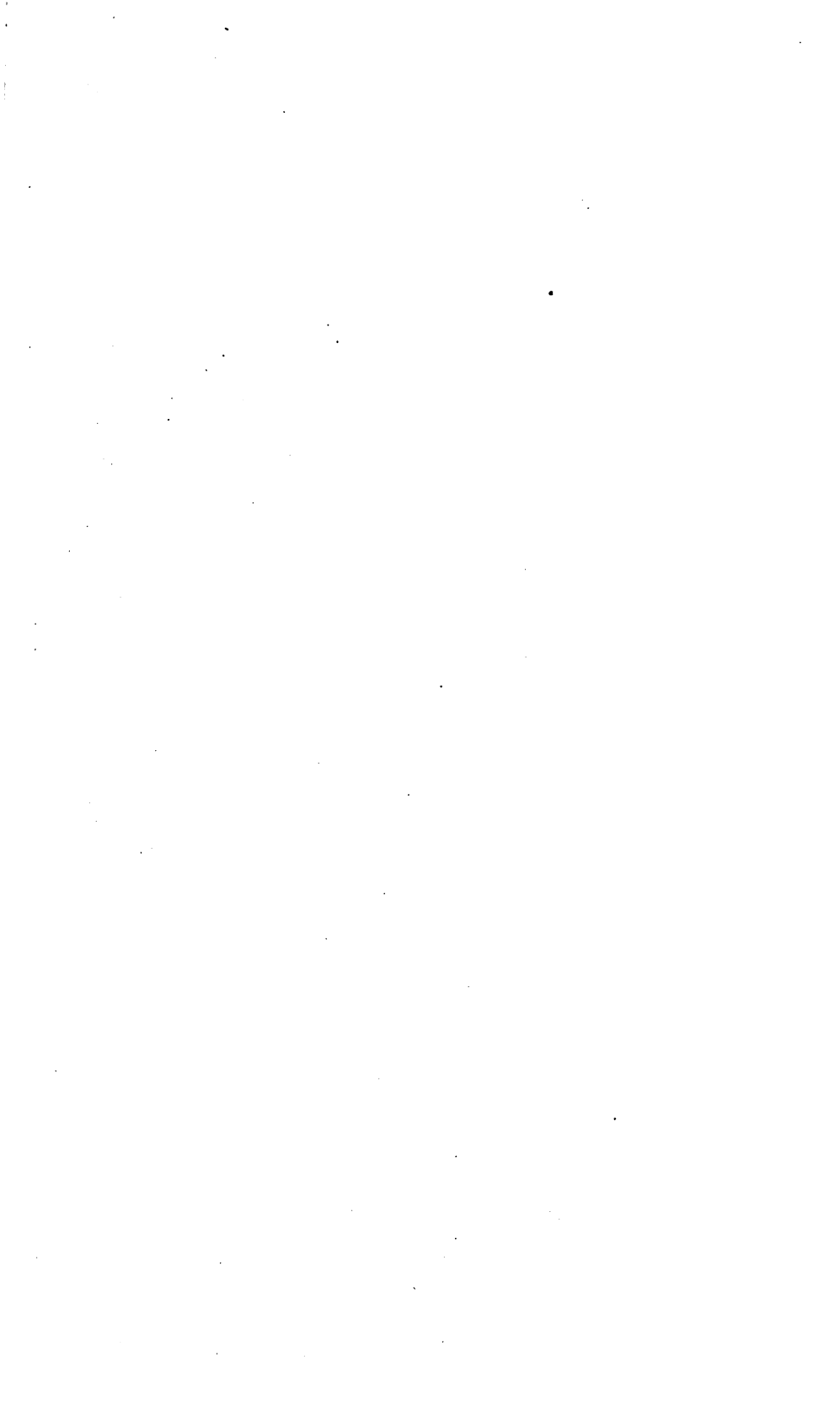
THE END.

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